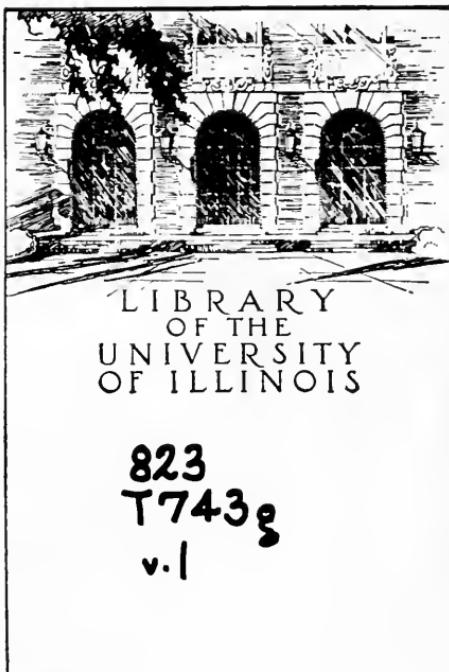
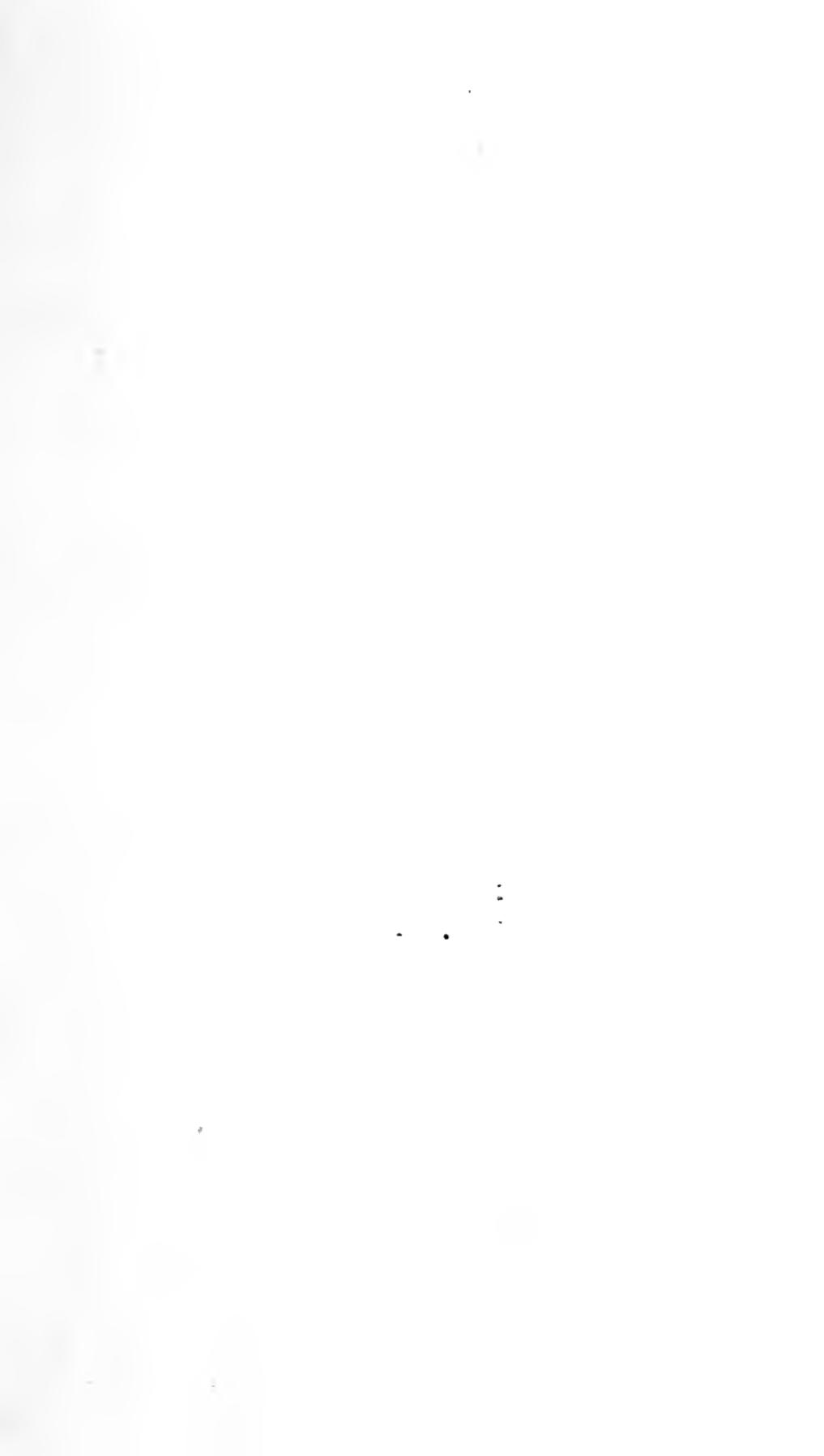


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THE GLADSTONES.

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BY

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AUTHOR OF

“THE MARKED MAN,” “BROKEN FETTERS,” “AN OLD MAN’S SECRET,”
“A RIGHT-MINDED WOMAN,” &c.

VOL. I.

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THE GLADSTONES.

CHAPTER I.

ONE fine autumn evening in the year 18—, two men and their wives were sitting on the banks of a trout stream that meandered through one of the most picturesque valleys in Yorkshire. A group of children were amusing themselves at some childish game a few yards from the river side, and, apart from both, two girls were conversing on matters of their own.

The two men—William Crisp and Henry Salmon—were factory men, and were talking on a variety of subjects, interesting not alone

to themselves, but to others in their position ; of bad times, low wages, and the high price of meat, bread, &c.

“ We shall never again see the good times we had during the war, William,” said Henry Salmon, in his usual grumbling tone. “ Those were the days for such as we, when we had as much work as we could do, from month’s end to month’s end ; aye, and what’s more, we were well paid for our labour.”

“ Yes, Henry, what you say is true enough ; but the war could not last for ever, and God forbid that it should,” rejoined William Crisp.

“ I can’t say ‘ amen ’ to that wish, if reduction of wages is to be the finish of it !” said Salmon. “ Why, I could earn as much in a couple of days during the war as I can now in a week. I am told, too, that Philips and Young are going to put their men on half-time next week.”

“ That’s a terrible thing, Henry,” said Crisp, with a saddened smile ; “ but for the matter of that, none of us, I dare say, are in

a much better condition. Mr. Gladstone gave me a hint of something of the kind the day before yesterday.”

“ Did he ?”

“ Yes ; and that reminds me I promised to step up to ‘ The Rookery ’ to-night,” said Crisp, and, after a minute, he continued, addressing his wife,—“ Are you ready to go home, Mary ?”

“ As soon as you please, William,” returned Mrs. Crisp. “ It’s getting rather chilly now the sun is going down, and Jessie is very delicate, you know.”

“ I don’t think you are over strong, missus,” said Salmon, more good-humouredly, as he turned to his sister-in-law. “ Just look at my Bess, what a fat, strong wench she is !”

“ Ah, Henry, you know I was always one of Pharoah’s lean kine !” laughed Mrs. Crisp. “ But what were you saying about your factory being put on half-time ?”

“ Oh ! you heard what I said, Mary,” in-

terrupted Salmon, gruffly. “ We are all to be put on short commons next week, I expect.”

“ Is trade so very bad ?” asked Mrs. Crisp, in an anxious tone.

“ They say so.”

“ That’s different to what William expected. At this season, too, when the manufactories are generally so full of orders. My husband always predicted that trade would improve instead of getting worse, when the war was over.”

“ So I did, my dear,” said her husband ; “ but you see, Mary, I am but a poor prophet after all.”

“ No doubt of that,” growled Salmon.

“ Come, Henry,” said his fat, good-tempered wife, speaking for the first time, “ what’s the use of making yourself unhappy ? If the manufacturers put their hands on short commons, we must try something else.”

“ Try something else !” repeated her husband.

“ Yes, I can try manty-making.”

“ I hate manty-making, Bess !” said Salmon, almost surlily.

“ But 'tis better than having to live upon short commons,” cried his wife, laughing.

“ I'd rather see you do anything than stitching your fingers off for such beggarly pay as you'd get.”

“ I only wish I was strong enough to work,” said Mrs. Crisp, looking affectionately into her husband's face, with that peculiar, silent smile that many invalids have. “ I know William would not object to my doing my best to get the bairns bread.”

“ Certainly not, Mary,” said her husband gravely ; “ but with your poor health you have quite as much as you can do to keep the house tidy and the bairns neat and clean. How very quiet they are,” he added, looking towards the group.

“ Bobby and Jessie are scarcely ever noisy,” said the mother. “ Jessie, dear,

don't you think we had better be making the best of our way home?"

"Yes, mother, if you like," said a sickly child of about six years old, in a feeble voice, from the group of children.

"You are very quiet to-night, lass," said her father, lifting her up into his arms and kissing the pale face that nestled snugly upon his breast. "What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know, father; I am very tired. Will you carry me home?" pleaded the child.

"That I will, my pet. Come, Mary, 'tis time we were going. Sarah, bring Bobby and Tommy."

William Crisp began to walk towards home.

The two young women arose, and came towards their elders. They presented a striking contrast, one being not only much stouter and taller than her companion, but had a totally different expression of countenance.

"I'm afraid these quiet walks don't suit

you, Fanny," said Crisp, somewhat sternly addressing the elder of the two. " You would rather be frolicking and dancing in some of the tea-gardens."

The girl, who was very beautiful, muttered words that were inaudible to the rest of the party, and tossed her head disdainfully. What she muttered was evidently not of a very dutiful nature.

" Don't anger her, William, dear," whispered Mrs. Crisp, drawing her husband away from the girl. " I am sure you do Fanny more harm than good when you speak to her so harshly."

Crisp looked fiercely for a moment—only for a moment—and then drew his wife's arm through his own, and, kissing the puny child nestling on his breast, began to walk homewards, in company with Salmon and his pleasant-looking wife, whilst the two girls, deserted by Billy and Tommy, who had run off after a dog, followed at some distance in the rear.

“Father’s always angering me with his sneering words!” cried the elder girl, whose face was distorted with passion. “I can’t walk out with a young man to keep me company, nor go to a tea-garden to have a dance, nor stay out half-an-hour more than ordinary at night, but he flies out into such a roaring passion.”

“Hush, Fanny! father will hear you,” said Sarah, a delicate-looking girl, who, though not as handsome as the elder girl, had a quiet, subdued face, and the sweet expression that was characteristic of William Crisp in his happier moments, but which in his daughter Sarah was habitual.

“I don’t care if he does,” cried Fanny, with a disdainful toss of the head. “I tell you what, Sarah, I won’t stand his sneering any longer.”

“For heaven’s sake don’t let father hear you talking in that strain, or there’ll be mischief, you may be sure,” cried the younger girl.

“ Father, indeed ! ” retorted Fanny, “ he’s no father of mine. I tell you, lass, I’ll stand no more of his hard words.”

“ Don’t say so.”

“ But I will say so,” interrupted the elder girl, in a sharp tone. “ I am free to come or go to-morrow, if I like, for any obedience I owe him.”

Sarah looked uneasily towards the elder people, fearing lest these rebellious words should be heard by any other ears than her own ; but having assured herself that the distance between them was too great, she began, in her kind, gentle way, to soothe the angry feelings of her half-sister.

“ Father’s so anxious just at this time, you know, Fanny,” she said in a pleading voice ; “ there’s nothing but complaints of the state of trade, and that frightens him.”

“ But that’s no reason why he should snarl at me in the way he does.”

“ He’s afraid,” proceeded Sarah, not noticing the interruption, “ that the wolf should

come to our door when mother and Jessie are so very poorly. You cannot think what dreadfully low spirits he has sometimes ; and if he does give you a sharp word occasionally—”

“ Occasionally !” repeated Fanny, “ he’s always giving me sharp words, and I am determined to put up with them no longer. Thank God, I can always earn my own bread, without being under obligation to him for it. Miss Thorne would make me forewoman tomorrow, if I’d promise to stay with her.”

“ Stay with her !” repeated Sarah, “ why surely you’ve no thought of leaving her.”

“ I have, though. There’s something else I’m thinking of trying,” said Fanny, significantly.

“ For God’s sake, Fanny, mind what you are about,” entreated her companion, clutching her arm. “ You are very handsome, and many men may fall in love with you for a short time ; but depend on it not one that you would think good enough would

marry you. Be advised and stay with Miss Thorne."

"What rubbish you talk, girl!" retorted her companion, snatching her arm away; and laughing and starting off at a pace her less hardy companion could only with difficulty keep up with. "What would you say, Sarah, if I was to tell you that there is a gentleman —aye, a real gentleman, that would marry me to-morrow, if I would give my consent."

"The man you have told me about so often, Fanny?" said Sarah, in a sorrowful tone.

"Yes, the same. Now what think you?" she asked.

"I don't want to think, for I know you will bring nothing but shame and disgrace upon yourself, and sorrow to your mother, if you listen to such lying tales. Mr. Smooth, if that's his name, wants no such wife as you would make him."

Fanny burst forth into an immoderate fit of boisterous laughter, which rose loud upon

the still, night air, in spite of Sarah's warning; and the next moment, as if attracted by the sound, a man appeared just in front of them, coming so unexpectedly upon their view that they at first thought he had sprang from the earth.

Sarah had seen Mr. Smooth once or twice, and she recognised him instantly. Fanny had pointed him out one evening as he sauntered up the street and past their house, and Sarah had never forgiven the bold staring eyes, determined features, and strong built frame her gaze had rested on. Of what he was, or where he came from, or what was his business in that locality, Fanny professed to be utterly ignorant.

“A fine evening, ladies,” said Mr. Smooth, taking off his hat and exhibiting a luxuriant crop of brown hair, “I consider myself very fortunate in having so unexpectedly met you.”

Fanny smiled and curtseyed, and said they were equally fortunate. Sarah hung down

her head to escape his impudent stare, walking on as briskly as she could.

“ This pretty damsel is your sister, I suppose, Fanny,” said Mr. Smooth, throwing his arm familiarly round Fanny’s waist, as she continued to keep pace with Sarah.

“ We call ourselves sisters, but we are not so in reality,” said Fanny coolly; “ we are only connected by the marriage of my mother with her father.”

“ Ah! connected by marriage. That’s one of the things I never could correctly understand,” said Mr. Smooth, ironically. “ Are you in a very great hurry, my dear,” addressing the younger girl.

“ Have the goodness, Mr. Smooth, to let Sarah alone,” interfered Fanny; “ she doesn’t like to be talked to in that way, and she shall not be annoyed.”

“ Upon my conscience, Fanny,” he cried, endeavouring to take hold of Sarah’s hand, but before he could guess what was about to happen, Fanny flew at him like a lioness robbed

of her cubs, and he was glad to spring out of her reach. He stood laughing, but evidently half frightened at the violence of her passion.

“Walk beside me, Sarah, and let any one at his peril dare to annoy you,” cried Fanny, in her defiant manner, and as Sarah complied, Fanny turned to Mr. Smooth, and said—

“If you intend to walk with us, sir, I beg you will not attempt to take liberties whilst Sarah is with us.”

“My beautiful wild cat!”

“Pshaw! I detest such ridiculous names. Call me Fanny if you wish me to answer you,” said the irate girl, scornfully.

“But you are in such a towering passion, Fanny.”

“Because I hate to see you playing the fool. Don’t you see you have made my sister cry?”

“I am very sorry for it.”

“That’s a lie; you never felt sorrow for anything in your life. Don’t be afraid, Sarah lass, he daren’t harm you. See, father’s

looking back. Mr. Smooth, you must leave us," she said, in a very peremptory tone.

"I won't budge an inch, Fanny."

"Then I'm sorry for you, for this is the last time you will have the pleasure of my company. If you stay here I shall catch a pretty blowing up, and then I shall get into a more furious passion with you, and I won't answer for the consequence. How long do you mean to take to make up your mind? Will you go?"

"I imagine I must, Fanny," said Mr. Smooth, ruefully. "I shall see you to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Perhaps you may; there, good-night."

Without another word she heard him spring into the wood, and then with a bold step she hurried to join the party in front.

William Crisp had, apparently, not noticed the young man, for he made no observation on the circumstance when the girls reached his side. Sarah felt great relief in consequence. Presently they gained the brow of

the hill they had for some time been ascending slowly, and the whole party drew up to recover breath, and to take a peep at the view obtained from the summit.

CHAPTER II.

A PRETTY village lay nestling on the side of a hill. This was the village of Braidsworth, where the Crisps and the Salmons resided. The eye first took in a row of workmen's houses, which had nothing very pleasing to recommend them. At the end of this row stood Braidsworth Foundry, with its black, grimy chimney and smoked cupolas ; and beyond this might be seen Braidsworth Church with its ivy covered tower and solemn looking yew trees. Still further away stood the Rectory house, the only really picturesque edifice in the village, and which, standing in its old-fashioned gardens, and backed by some fine trees, the

growth of years, helped to make a charming picture, aided, as it was, by masses of creeping plants of various kinds climbing nearly to the roof.

Braidsworth had, in former years, been a more flourishing village than it was at the period at which we write ; for, like many other places in Yorkshire, competing villages had sprung up around it, and materially interfered with its trade ; but these new places could not rob it of its picturesque Rectory with its gabled ends, numerous windows, and curious chimneys, nor of its Rector, one of the best of parsons, as well as one of the kindest-hearted gentlemen in Yorkshire.

On the other side the workmen's houses was a bridle path, which led alongside a wood to a house standing apart from any other. Completely the reverse of the Rectory it was as plain and unpretending as the latter was quaint and picturesque. It was a square, brick building, with stone copings to the door, and windows of unusual size, showing that the

architect had cared more for utility than elegance in the structure. But the unpretending appearance of the building was atoned for by the large garden that surrounded it, which showed evidence of having been laid out with the most masterly skill and taste.

At one end of the house was a conservatory of ample dimensions.

“I must speak with Mr. Gladstone to-night, Mary,” said William Crisp. “Perhaps, Henry,” addressing his brother-in-law, “you and Bess will be kind enough to see the wife and bairns safe home, whilst I step up to ‘The Rookery.’ Jessie, dear, you’ll let Uncle Salmon carry you home.”

“You won’t be long, William?” said Mrs. Crisp, as her husband was leaving her.

“Not above half-an-hour, I expect. Sarah,” he continued, addressing his daughter, “go round by the doctor’s for your mother’s medicine.” And then speaking to his wife, “Get out of the night air, Mary, as quickly as you can.”

And, with this parting injunction, William Crisp wended his way towards 'The Rookery.'

By the time Crisp got into the bridle path, the trees in the wood we have mentioned made the place dark as he walked through it. A small pasture divided the path from the house to which he was going, and in this pasture, seated upon a stile, he found the person he was in search of.

"Is that you, Crisp?" asked a young man apparently not more than twenty-eight or nine.

"Yes, Mr. Gladstone," replied Crisp. "It is so dark that I almost stumbled upon you without seeing you. I thought I'd come up to 'The Rookery,' and hear if you wanted anything."

"Want anything?" said Mr. Gladstone, with an odd sort of laugh, "we want many things, William; we want work for one thing—money for another—we want, too, the heart to set about things, when it is so difficult to say whether they'll do us good or harm."

“ That’s true, Mr. William,” said Crisp, solemnly.

“ Yes, and the way things are going is enough to crush the heart out of any man, William.”

“ Indeed it is, sir,” said Crisp, “ but please God, matters will take a turn ere long.”

“ I wish you may prove a true prophet,” rejoined Mr. Gladstone. “ You must send those castings to Halifax.”

“ I will see them sent off the first thing in the morning. Anything else, sir?”

“ Not that I recollect.”

“ I’m told, sir, that Philips and Young are going to put their hands on half-time next week.”

“ So Mr. Jobson informed me this morning, when we met at Halifax. I am sorry for it, but what can the masters do, Crisp. Only consider for a moment what enormous sums of money are lying dead in their mills and foundries. It is impossible for them to go on paying men full wages for doing half work.”

“ That’s true, sir,” said Crisp, in a very grave tone.

“ We should one and all be ruined before we knew what we were about,” rejoined Mr. Gladstone.

“ No doubt you would, sir, and unfortunately the ruin of the masters will not tend to lessen the privations and distress of the workmen, but add greatly to the discomfort and misery of their homes in the coming winter.”

“ That is quite certain, but what can be done?”

“ I think Government ought to do something for the workmen.”

“ How?” demanded Mr. Gladstone, somewhat sharply.

Crisp was unable to suggest a plan, and said—

“ All I know is, that there’s a vast amount of suffering amongst the working classes, and I cannot help saying that I think the Government is answerable for it.”

Mr. Gladstone smiled at Crisp's crude notions of a Government feeding the thousands of workers.

“Why, William, if your views were adopted by the Government, the whole nation would sooner or later be bankrupt. No, no, such misfortunes must work their own cure.”

“But Government takes precious good care, sir, that whether it finds us work or not, it won’t give us cheap bread, nor cheap tea. Why, Mr. Gladstone, you know that not very long since, wheat was up to a guinea a bushel, and if work had been scarce then, why there would have been a famine more awful than that we read of in the Bible.”

“Then you would abolish the corn laws, William?” said Mr. Gladstone, with some little interest.

“That I would, sir, and every other law that presses upon the industry of the people. It makes one’s blood boil to think how we are ground down and plundered to enrich those above us. Only look at the price of

corn at this very moment, sixty-eight shillings a quarter, and wages from twelve to fourteen shillings a week, and in some cases eight or nine mouths to feed. Oh ! Mr. Gladstone, it's enough to drive one mad."

"Have patience, William."

"Patience, sir ; you might as well desire the lightning and thunder to cease in the midst of a tempest, as to tell us to have patience, when such bad prospects are staring us in the face. I only wish I was king of England for a month, I'd make the working men, aye, and their wives and bairns too, bless that month's rule."

Mr. Gladstone leaped off the stile, and walked towards his house. When he emerged into the fading daylight you saw that he had a lithe, active figure, was a trifle above the medium height, had a countenance full of intelligence, and features with some pretensions to manly beauty. He had dark hair, a complexion somewhat bronzed, and when he spoke, his tone was decisive, and gave the

notion that he was in the habit of carrying out his resolutions with promptness.

Mr. Gladstone was the master of the foundry, and owner of the plain-looking house we have described. William Crisp was his foreman, and a rather privileged person, having been employed from boyhood in Mr. Gladstone's family. Mr. Gladstone's father had only been dead about four years.

Apparently he did not wish to continue the discussion that Crisp had introduced, for he commenced talking about the Trades Union. During the previous winter large numbers of men had held meetings, in various parts of Yorkshire and Lancashire, to discuss their grievances, and to try and suggest a remedy for the disadvantages under which they laboured. The Government endeavoured to awe these suffering creatures into subjection, and in Manchester and other places the military were called out, the people fired upon, and several killed.

Thus thwarted in their attempts to assemble

in the open air for the purpose of discussing their grievances, the boldest of them formed themselves into Unions, and engaged missionaries to gain converts to their theories. The masters, as a body, were opposed to these Unions, which in the eye of the law were illegal, and, as the law at that day was not so amenable to public opinion as it is at the present time, the Legislature was prepared to put down the lurking treason, as they chose to term it, with a high hand.

Mr. Gladstone had been the most active and determined opposer of the Unionists. He had pointed out ably, calmly and plainly to the workmen the mischievous tendency of the Unionists in meddling with the existing relations between the employer and the employed ; and he had been equally active in organising a powerful opposition amongst the masters. Bold and daring himself, he had given courage to the cowardly, and decision to the wavering ; and though probably the youngest manufacturer in the district, he had been

tacitly placed at the head of the counter-movement that had sprung up as a check to the Republicanism with which the country was threatened.

“Do you know, Crisp,” he asked abruptly, “when and where the next meeting of the Unionists will take place?”

“I do not,” replied Crisp, “but I shall have no difficulty in ascertaining, as I know one young man who is unfortunately connected with the movement—” here he suddenly stopped short, fearing his master might ask the name.

Mr. Gladstone did not care to ask. He preferred to cope with the corruption of the mass than the sickness of the individual, and he walked on up the pasture asking numerous questions, some of which Crisp could answer, but others which he could not.

“Come in, Crisp, and get something to eat,” he said, kindly, as they stood for a minute at the garden gate; “it’s a good step to your house.”

“Thank you, Mr. Gladstone ; I must not stay to-night,” said Crisp. “I’ve promised my wife to get home as quickly as possible, for, as you know, sir, she’s very delicate, and was complaining of weariness when I parted from her.”

“Then you won’t come in?”

“Not to-night, thank you, sir.”

“Then I’ll say good-night. Look after the things that are to be sent off in the morning,” and Mr. Gladstone opened the gate and walked leisurely up the path.

The dewy night air was sweet with the perfume of mignonette, musk, and sweet-briar ; so rich that it made him feel heart-sick, as, whilst inhaling it, he thought of the conversation that had passed between his foreman and himself, during their walk towards the house.

“How calm and beautiful the night is,” he murmured ; “and the perfumes—how delicious. Nature seems to mock the constant care, and the weary turmoil in which man is doomed to live—and—these are dangerous

fancies to indulge in, so I will go in and see if a little society will drive ‘dull care away,’ for a few hours,” and without further heeding the odorous treasures that lay around him, he walked on towards the house.

CHAPTER III.

MR. GLADSTONE entered his house through a half-glazed door into a passage that was rather dark just at that hour, for his house-keeper was a thrifty woman, and had a disinclination to the use of oil in the passage during the summer and autumn; indeed, she considered it “a shameful piece of extravagance.” Her master, therefore, had to wend his way in the best manner he could, and had a little difficulty in reaching the door of the room which the ladies of the house usually occupied during the evening. There, at least, old Hannah’s thrift was vanquished by a superior power, for as he opened the door, a

bright blaze of light rushed out upon him, together with the hum of several voices.

The party was a merry one, consisting of two gentlemen and three ladies, all of whom were seated or standing in various parts of the room. The deep sonorous voice of a middle-aged, portly gentleman was predominant. You saw at a glance that he was the parish clergyman, not so much by his black coat and white cravat as by the suavity and good breeding that characterised his manner. It was Dr. Vinen, the Rector of Braidsworth.

Sitting opposite the Rector was one of the sweetest creatures you could possibly imagine. A face of perfect beauty—in which the bloom of the peach and the clearness of the lily seemed striving for mastery—was lighted up with a smile of artless happiness as she carried on a running fire of words with the Rector. In person she was *petite*. Very few could see Kate Gladstone without loving her.

Miss Gladstone, whose Christian name was Sophia, sat apart from the rest, on a couch

constructed by her brother, by whose mechanical skill it had been devised, to obviate the recumbent posture she had been compelled to assume, owing to an accident she had met with some years before. Like Kate, she was diminutive, but had not her beauty ; on the contrary she was very plain. Her intelligent countenance, however, made people forget her plainness. Her age was about thirty-four, or perhaps a year or two more—gallantry forbids our being over particular on this point. Near the couch stood Frances, who was tall, and few would have imagined that she was the youngest of the family, but such was actually the case. She was much more sedate and generally more grave than the volatile Kate, and three years her junior. At the first glance you would have said she was like her brother, with the sterner lineaments of his face softened down into the placid calmness that usually characterised her. Upon looking at her a second time a great difference between them was apparent.

William, with all his good looks, had much sternness in the sharp, decisive lines of his face, and the eye had a slumbering fire in it that Frances's soft grey orbs wanted. No one could spend a couple of hours in William Gladstone's company without being assured that he would prove a dangerous man to meddle with, and respected him accordingly.

Frances could not be called handsome, and yet there was that indefinable something in her countenance which, to many people, is more attractive than actual beauty. Her figure was good, nay, graceful, and as she stood with one foot on the fender she displayed an ankle that a sculptor would have been glad to take as a model. What Kate was deficient in Frances possessed—a soul looking out of her calm grey eyes, which more than compensated for the absence of that radiant beauty with which her sister was so largely endowed.

The person who was standing near Kate

was a handsome young fellow named William Wilding, a gentleman possessing a good estate and plenty of leisure time on his hands, which latter he got over by loving alternately Kate and Frances, as the humour suited him. Kate, however, was the most favoured, and we may as well at once call him her lover.

There was a vast difference between the interior and exterior of “The Rookery.” We have described the exterior. The room which William Gladstone entered was large and handsome, and furnished with a degree of elegance and comfort that would have scarcely been expected from the Quaker-like appearance of the outside. At the end of the room was a kind of boudoir—a thing scarcely known in England at the time—containing a profusion of plants, altogether forming a small conservatory, expressly built for Sophia Gladstone, to amuse her during her many hours of confinement.

“Where have you been, William?” asked Kate, who was always ready to tease her

brother. “Dr. Vinen and Mr. Wilding have been waiting to see you an hour or more.”

“We have scarcely been here so long, Miss Kate,” said the Rector.

“I think you have, Doctor. At any rate, it’s too bad of William to keep tea waiting.”

“It would scarcely repay your curiosity, Kate, if I were to tell you,” said her brother, taking a seat. “William Crisp came up from the village to speak to me.”

He felt conscious that Frances’s face was turned towards him as he spoke, although he could not see her, and that Dr. Vinen looked grave in a moment, although a minute before a smile had been visible on his fresh coloured face.

“I hope he brought you no bad news, brother,” said Frances, calmly.

“Things seem so completely disjointed that I scarcely know what is good news and what is bad,” said the manufacturer, gravely. “I think we shall soon see all the workmen in this part of England put on half time.”

“I am grieved to hear that,” observed Dr. Vinen. “It was predicted that the termination of the war would greatly improve trade instead of causing depression.”

“That was the general feeling, and I confess it was my impression,” was William’s bitter response.

“Why did it not do so?” demanded Kate.

Her brother smiled at the simplicity of the question, and answered by saying—

“I can only reply by stating a fact, that there are some laws which go by no rule at all, and that the laws that regulate trade are of this class. It very often happens that commercial events disappoint the expectations of the most experienced.”

Kate looked puzzled, but did not seek for further enlightenment.

“I fear we shall see a great deal of suffering among the working people ere long,” observed Miss Gladstone.

“Let us hope things will take a turn,” said Dr. Vinen. “Don’t you think we are making

ourselves sad to very little purpose ? Kate, my dear, suppose you enliven us with some music.”

Kate at once seated herself at the piano, saying to Dr. Vinen—

“ What shall I play ?”

“ Something spirited,” rejoined the Rector.

“ ‘Drops of Brandy,’ ” laughed Kate.

“ Or ‘ Begone dull care,’ ” added the Rector.

“ Play ‘ Logie O’Buchan,’ ” said Wilding.

Kate made no response, but commenced playing, and when she finished looked round for the customary applause.

“ You played out of time, Kate,” cried her brother from the other end of the room.

Kate bit her lip, and tried not to look annoyed, as she said, pettishly—

“ You always find fault with my playing, William.”

“ When you play incorrectly—never otherwise,” her brother answered, with provoking dryness. “ Frances, ring for supper.”

Frances rang the bell, and a very quaint-

looking servant made her appearance. Her name was Hannah Newman. She had lived in the Gladstone family from her girlhood, and she was now a clumsy, sour-looking woman of forty-nine, and treated the “bairns,” as she called the Misses Gladstone, with a freedom that is rarely met with out of the Yorkshire dales, and would have behaved in the same way to her master had she not stood in great fear of his stern, silent manner. At heart, however, she was as faithful a creature as could be desired, and would have died to have averted from any of them a moment’s pain.

“Is it supper you want, Miss Frances?” she asked, in her rough and ready sort of way.

“If you please, Hannah,” was the reply.

Hannah, without another word, commenced putting a snow-white cloth on the table, which she had taken from a sideboard drawer, and then left the room for the purpose of bringing in a tray, on which was a cold fowl,

a sirloin of beef, and a large loaf. Knives and forks were then placed on the table with clumsy carelessness that made Dr. Vinen, as it always did, smile. These preliminaries being accomplished, Hannah again left the room, and in a couple of minutes returned with a tray of tarts and custards, for which latter she had gained considerable reputation by all visitors to 'The Rookery.' She looked much pleasanter as she placed these opposite the cold sirloin, and glanced over to Dr. Vinen, who smiled his approbation.

"That's a standing dish of yours, Mrs. Hannah?" he said in his pleasant voice, as he noticed the look.

"It is, sir, and sorry I am I can't teach that muddle-headed cook of yours how to make them," she said, dropping a curtsey. "She's only a poor weak body, Dr. Vinen."

"Oh! she'll do well enough; it's not every one that's so great an epicure as Mr. Gladstone."

"He!—he never knows what he eats,"

cried Hannah, with a grim smile, “ Mr. William wouldn’t know mutton broth from mockturtle.”

“ For shame, Hannah !” said her master, laughing, “ how dare you give me such a character.”

“ Why, sir, you know you never can tell the difference between a chop and a steak, and you’re always calling out for mustard to veal,” she said, maliciously. “ You know you do, Mr. William.”

“ Oh ! the Gladstones all eat mustard with everything ?” said her master.

“ None but yourself does that, Mr. William ; come, your supper is waiting,” and she stuck herself behind Mr. Gladstone’s chair, to hand the plates.

Dr. Vinen said grace, an old fashioned ceremony he never omitted, and the repast commenced. Hannah filled the glasses with ale, not condescending to ask if water was preferred, in fact, she knew what everybody drank, and did not see the use of being extra

polite, even to the Rector. When the meat had been taken away she placed the custard and tarts before Frances Gladstone, and then walked out of the room as sturdily as she had entered.

“Have you heard that there have been several cases of fever in Braidsworth?” asked William, addressing Dr. Vinen, after a pause.

“The doctor told me so, when he called on Monday,” was the Rector’s reply. “I am very sorry to hear it.”

“So am I; with work getting more scarce every day, and many people already out of employment.”

“It’s very sad,” said the clergyman.

“And still more appalling to hear of a dreadful malady making its appearance.”

“Is the fever of a malignant nature?” asked Frances.

“Yes; I believe it’s of a very malignant kind.”

The whole party looked grave, for each recollected the last visit of that frightful

scourge to Braidsworth, which carried off nearly a third of the population of the village.

“ I hope the fever will not come here,” said Kate, in a low, tremulous voice.

“ The weather is not in our favour,” observed Mr. Wilding, “ the heat is so oppressive.”

“ No doubt of that,” replied Mr. Gladstone. “ I think, doctor,” he continued, addressing the clergyman, “ some preliminary steps should be instantly taken to drive back the relentless foe. Many of the workmen’s houses, even in Braidsworth, are exceedingly dirty, and require a thorough routing out.”

“ How would you proceed?” asked Dr. Vinen.

“ In the first place, a committee should be formed to look into sanitary matters, and see that every habitable place in the parish is well scoured and whitewashed, without the slightest delay. Smith and I can go with you and order it to be done.”

Smith was the village doctor.

“ That is the plan they are pursuing in Bradford, I believe, and I don’t think we can do better than follow the example.”

“ There are plenty of dirty houses in Braidsworth,” said Frances, “ and I don’t know how it happens that some of the most charming places in this neighbourhood are the most unhealthy.”

“ Which of the places in particular do you allude to, Frances ?” asked her brother.

“ Newman’s cottage, for instance ; I never pass the spot without being charmed with the quaint old gables peeping out from the mass of verdure that surrounds it. A month ago, when many of the trees were in blossom, and the air was scented from the flowers, Newman’s children were all ill.”

“ The place is very damp,” said her brother.

“ Why should it be damp ?” pursued Frances.

“ The fruit and other trees make it so. If

I were a doctor I would protest against having fruit trees, or any other trees, so near a house as they are at Newman's. Depend on it, it's a great mistake."

"And then, there's that pretty place called 'The Lees,'" said Frances, turning her eager glance at the clergyman. "It is built on the side of a hill, with a running stream in front, and surrounded by woods, that give it a sylvan beauty that would charm a poet or a landscape painter. Poor Mrs. Druce declares that the moment the cold weather sets in she has the ague."

"You must be put on the committee, Frances," said Dr. Vinen, with a smile.

"Nothing I should like better," replied Frances, laughing.

"What would the churchwarden and overseer say to such an innovation?" asked her brother.

"Say," continued Frances, cheerfully; "that Mrs. Vinen, Hannah, and I would do

much more good than you, Mr. William Gladstone, with Dr. Vinen, the churchwarden and overseer to back you."

" Well, Miss Frances, time flies ; and to-morrow I will see you, to talk the matter over," said the clergyman, looking at his watch. " It's getting very late. I believe, Wilding, your road is past the Rectory."

He arose and took Miss Gladstone's hand kindly in his own, as he said, in a tone of peculiar gentleness, " Good night, my dear Sophia."

" Tell Mrs. Vinen to come and see me to-morrow," said the invalid.

" I will ;" and he followed Kate and her brother and Mr. Wilding out of the room.

The night was remarkably fine, and the moon was shining brightly ; the air was rich with the perfume from the fields, mingled with the flowery odours from Frances's garden, and the party instinctively paused in the porch to enjoy it.

" How delicious the air is," sighed Kate, as

she hung on Wilding's arm. "It must have been just such a night as this when Titania fell so desperately in love with poor Bottom, the weaver."

"What a silly speech," returned Wilding, laughing.

"It almost makes me feel too happy," continued Kate, not heeding the remark, and prattling away as merrily as a child, "and yet, somehow the feeling is by no means free from pain."

She plucked half-a-dozen roses from a bush near which she was standing.

"For whom are you getting those lovely roses?" asked Wilding.

"For Dr. Vinen, if he will do me the honour of accepting them," she replied, smiling, and presenting the flowers to the clergyman.

"I accept them with pleasure," said the doctor, taking the flowers from Kate, "and shall put them under my pillow."

"And dream of—"

"Kate Gladstone," interrupted the clergy-

man, bowing gallantly, and shaking hands with her, as he bade her ‘good night.’

Mr. Gladstone had retreated into the porch, and was watching Kate, who, having bade the two gentlemen good night, now turned round, and was looking up at the house with an intentness that was not usual with her. The moonlight had softened its plainness, and, as she gazed she caught, by accident, a glimpse of her brother’s dark figure, with his head drooped upon his breast.

With all the timidity of a child, she moved cautiously towards him, slipped her arm in his, and looked up imploringly in his face.

“What is the matter, Kate?” he asked, looking down on the almost frightened face she held up to him.

“You seem so very sad, William,” she said, artlessly, as he led her up the walk.

As they approached the gate, Kate saw Frances, and exclaimed—

“What, in the name of fortune, are you doing here, Frances, all by yourself?”

“Hush,” said Frances, in a low voice. “I thought I heard some one coming down the footpath.”

“That would not be very surprising,” said her brother, “as the path is a public one; and it’s just the sort of night for a couple of lovers to take a stroll. For—

“‘ When should lovers breathe their vows,
When should ladies hear them ?
When the dew is on the boughs,
When none else is near them.

When the moon shines cold and pale,
When the birds are sleeping ;
When no voice is in the gale,
When the rose is weeping.’ ”

“I cannot promise to do what you wish, Mr. Smooth,” said a voice that Frances knew very well, in a somewhat loud key; although the people, whoever they were, were some distance off.

“Why not?”

“Because father is always snubbing me for being out late at night, and I’ve almost determined to have done with it.”

“Hush! you silly goose,” said her com-

panion, in a somewhat lower tone, “you have promised over and over to take the trip some day.”

“Pooh! I tell you again, Mr. Smooth, I won’t,” exclaimed the girl, in an apparently frightened manner. “What do you think father and mother will say when they hear I’ve gone off in that way?”

“Crisp is not your father, Fanny,” said the man, as the speakers came close beside the hedge where Mr. Gladstone and his sisters were standing.

“No matter for that. I owe him more than ever I am likely to repay, for the food and care he took of me through my childhood; and, bad as I am, I’ll not bring him to shame now.” As they walked rapidly on, the conversation became too indistinct to be intelligible, and in a minute or two they were quite out of hearing.

“I must warn Crisp of that scoundrel’s machinations,” said Mr. Gladstone, after a pause. “I more than suspect he is one of

the principal movers in those accursed trade-unions, and I'm more than certain he intends ruin to that poor girl."

"That's likely enough," said Frances, as they walked up the garden again. "I will talk to Fanny myself when I find an opportunity."

And they joined Sophia in her sitting-room again.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN William Crisp arrived at home, after his interview with Mr. Gladstone, he found his daughter Sarah alone, sitting up for him.

“Where’s thy mother, lass?” he asked, abruptly, on noticing his wife’s empty chair. “It’s not very late; it only struck ten by the foundry clock as I passed.”

“Mother complained of being only middling, and has been a-bed an hour or more, father,” said Sarah, sadly.

“More’s the pity, Sarah, lass,” rejoined her father, “and is Fanny a-bed too?”

Sarah affected to be too much engaged to hear the latter question.

“Don’t you hear what I say, Sarah?” demanded Crisp, gruffly. “Where is Fanny?”

“She’s not come in yet,” said Sarah, tremblingly.

“I’ll tell thee what, girl,” continued her father, flinging his hat upon the table, and sitting down in his wife’s chair, “these going out o’ nights do a young girl much harm, and it’s what I won’t allow anyone residing under my roof to do. Fanny, I’m very much afeard, is coming to no good.”

“Oh, father!”

“I feel morally certain she’s taking a crooked path,” said Crisp, with considerable sternness. “She will end by becoming a common street-walker. If she does, she shall never enter my house again!”

“Perhaps Miss Thorne may have detained her,” suggested Sarah, although she did not think so.

“I’ll set that question at rest,” cried her father. “I’ll go to Miss Thorne’s in the morning, and ask her if Fanny ever works

there till this hour, and if she doesn't I'll make the girl turn over a new leaf, or out of my house she shall go; 'one scabbed sheep taints a whole flock !'"

"But Fanny is so much confined all day, father, and the nights just now are so pleasant," pleaded Sarah, who was quite frightened at her father's wrathful temper.

"I don't care, Sarah, for that; you never want to go out in the way she does, and thou'rt closer kept during the day."

"I cannot leave mother, or I should like a walk, father," said Sarah.

"And thou shalt have one, lass, if thou'l't only wait a bit," said Crisp, patting her pale cheek. "But you must tell Fanny as soon as she comes in, that I will not suffer her to be out o' nights at this late hour. Is your mother asleep?"

"I think she is."

"Then I'll go quietly up-stairs, so that I may not disturb her," said Crisp, rising. "Don't forget to tell Fanny what I have said,

lass. Good night, and God bless thee, my dear!" and he took her delicate face in his rough hands, and kissed her forehead.

Sarah watched him go up the creaking stairs, and enter his little bedroom. As soon as she heard the bedroom door closed, she burst out into a violent fit of crying. Notwithstanding Fanny's bold manners and evident love of flattery, Sarah thought she was free from vice, and was not a little shocked when she heard her father judge her so harshly. Her father's determination, too, she reflected, in her good nature, was not kind. Then she thought of Fanny's high spirit and resolute will, and could not help fearing that, when told of her father's determination, she would be driven to do something either very rash or very sinful.

Whilst she was thus crying and thinking, the door opened, and Fanny came stealthily into the room, but not till she had seen that her step-father was not there.

Sarah looked up, and saw at a glance that

Fanny's face was very much flushed, and that her eyes were very red as if she had recently been crying.

"You are very late, Fanny," she said, making a considerable effort for composure. "Father's been in a bitter passion since he came home."

"What about?"

"About you."

Fanny looked at her, but did not speak.

The scorn which Sarah saw on Fanny's face gave the timid girl courage to continue.

"He doesn't approve of your keeping out so late at night. He desired me to tell you that you must come home earlier in the future."

"Did he?" exclaimed Fanny, with a satirical smile. "Why, lass, you don't know what thou'rt talking about. Young girls like me must have a little fresh air, after working so many hours all day at the needle, as I do."

"Father doesn't object to that, Fanny," said Sarah, boldly.

“ Then, pray, lass, what does he object to ? ”

“ To your staying out till this time o’ the night.”

“ Well, then, I won’t do it again,” returned Fanny, who had turned round, and was gazing abstractedly into the fire.

“ That’s right,” said Sarah, much pleased.

“ Are you ready for bed ? ” asked Fanny.

“ Not quite. I’ve got this hole in Tommy’s sock to mend ; poor little fellow, I wish I had time to knit him a new pair. P’raps you’ll rub up the table a bit whilst I work.”

“ Why don’t you knit the bairn new socks ? you’ve nothing to hinder you,” said Fanny ; “ you’ve plenty of time now.”

“ Not much of that ; I’ve everything to do, or nearly so, since mother has become so ill and weak.”

Fanny, instead of assisting by rubbing the table, coolly sat down in a chair before the fire, and allowed Sarah to do all the work, so that it was nearly twelve o’clock before they crept noiselessly upstairs to their bedroom.

Fanny, whilst the operation of undressing was going on, looked scornfully around her at the poor accommodation they had in the narrow room, and more than once caught herself sighing for the fine mirrors and luxurious carpets which the companion she had so recently left had often told her that a girl possessing so much beauty richly deserved.

“How would you like to be rich, Sarah?” she abruptly asked, as she sat curling her luxuriant hair before a small glass.

“I’m quite content, Fanny, as I am,” replied Sarah, meekly. “If I had to be rich perhaps I should be separated from father and mother, as well as the bairns, and I couldn’t bear that. Why did you ask?”

“For no reason whatever,” rejoined Fanny, laughing; “only a gipsy once told me I should be rich, and I was wondering if it would ever come to pass.”

“Don’t indulge in such lofty notions, Fanny, if you value your peace of mind,” said Sarah, seriously. “Father says many

bonny lasses have had her happiness wrecked by the fortune telling gipsies putting such vain notions into their weak heads.”

Fanny’s lip curled contemptuously at the idea of William Crisp having seen enough of the world to enable him to make such a discovery ; and she mentally made a comparison between him and Mr. Smooth, who had often told her what a sensation her beauty would create if she would accompany him to London.

“ Well,” she said, as she put aside the glass, “ time will prove if the gipsy was right. At any rate I’m very tired of this sort of life, and intend looking out for a better.”

Sarah was too tired to hear much of what she said, and by the time Fanny had put out the light was fast asleep, with her innocent head resting on her right arm.

Fanny’s rest, however, was neither so sound nor so sweet, for ambitious desires after visionary grandeur racked her mind, and consequently she kept tossing from side to side,

sighing for sleep, whilst Sarah slept soundly and tranquilly at her side.

Early in the morning the latter was aroused by hearing Jessie's feeble voice calling her. The sickly child was often very restless at night, and the only way Sarah could soothe and quiet her was by lying down beside her in the child's crib ; Jessie would then nestle in her arms, and with her little head pillow'd on her sister's breast would sink to sleep for an hour or two, to awake up again with another feeble moan.

On this morning, however, all Sarah's tenderness and nursing could not quiet the invalid. It was in vain that she pressed the fevered head to her breast, soothing her, as well as she could, with gentle words and tender kisses, which the child returned with her hot parched lips. As the daylight brightened in the little chamber, she seemed to grow worse, and yet unwilling to disturb her father, who needed all the rest he could obtain to fit him for the laborious work he had to endure

during the day, Sarah still refrained from rousing others in the house, lest in doing so she should disturb both father and mother.

“ Carry me about a bit, Sarah dear,” whispered the suffering child, as the cocks began to crow; “ see that glimmer of sunshine stealing in upon us; but, dear, how hot and heavy my head is.”

Sarah had noticed the early sunbeam falling upon her sister’s face, which, instead of its usual pallor, now wore a hectic flush that both terrified and alarmed her. Fanny, who was awake and was sitting up in bed, as was usual with her, did not offer to assist Sarah in her nursing.

Another weary hour passed, bringing no relief to the suffering child, who lay on Sarah’s breast without the power to lift her head from its resting-place. Whenever Sarah moistened her lips with water Jessie’s pale face was lighted up with a smile, and then the little head falling back again a few faint moans would escape her lips.

Sarah drew the only chair the room contained to the window, and sat gazing on the fresh summer landscape, glowing into life and beauty beneath the reviving influence of morning; but the cheering influence of the sunrise was unheeded, her thoughts were with the sick child that lay heavy and impulsive as lead in her arms.

Presently she heard her father's voice in the adjoining room, and now for the first time aware that he was awake, she called him to come to her. He did so in a moment, fully dressed, looking rather stern, for his features were not pleasant when in repose; but they immediately softened when he asked what was the matter.

“ Jessie's very bad, I'm afraid, father,” was Sarah's rejoinder. “ She woke me up about four o'clock.”

Crisp took the child gently in his arms, and spoke words of great tenderness to her, as he always did.

“ Lay me in my crib, daddy dear,” she

said, feebly, as he kissed her hot, clammy forehead ; “the room is all turning round with me.”

“ I’ll call on the doctor, Sarah, and get him to look in,” said Crisp, as he placed the child in the crib. “ Poor thing, I’m afraid she’s mortal bad this morning. Call thy mother up as soon as I’m gone.”

“ Fanny might do, father,” said Sarah, not wishing to disturb her mother.

“ I won’t have a child of mine waited on by her,” said Crisp, in an exceedingly stern voice. “ Call thy mother up, there’s a good lass.”

He thought Fanny was asleep, and as he spoke he crept away and went out of the house.

“ I’ll not forget that, girl,” cried Fanny, sitting up in bed, as soon as she heard the door pulled to after her step-father. “ Brats like his indeed, are too good for me to nurse ‘em are they ?” she muttered, in a low, angry voice.

By the time Mrs. Crisp was up and dressed the doctor arrived. Fanny had also dressed

herself, and, with her hair in greasy curl papers, might be seen peeping over the shoulders of the little group gathered round the child's crib.

"I'm afraid your little girl has caught the prevailing fever, Mrs. Crisp," he said at last, very gravely.

The mother's fears told her, in the few words spoken by the medical man, that her child was doomed. Jessie was so very delicate that there was very faint hope of her bearing up against any disease of more than ordinary intensity.

"My little girl was more than usually lively last night, sir," said the poor mother, in a low, trembling voice; "may not that have overdone her."

The doctor made no reply; he knew that the child was not suffering from mere exhaustion of the body.

"I will send you some medicine as soon as I get home," he said, as he left the room.

“And you really think, sir, poor Jessie has caught the fever?” said the mother.

“Yes, and I should advise you, Mrs. Crisp, to send those two boys away, that I saw as I passed through the kitchen, until I am quite certain about the case.”

“I’ll name it to my husband as soon as he comes in. I have some relations at Chilworth who will be glad to receive them if my husband wishes it.”

“Very well; the sooner they are off the better.”

“I suppose, sir, you fear infection?” asked the mother.

“I do. This little girl, I think, is going to be very ill. You know, Mrs. Crisp, it’s desirable to be prepared for the worst.”

“No doubt, sir,” said Mrs. Crisp, in a husky voice.

As soon as the doctor had gone, Sarah and her mother talked the matter over, and came to a determination to send Bobby and Tommy

away at once, if the father would agree to their doing so.

A more selfish tempered girl than Sarah Crisp would have deemed herself very hardly dealt by, considering what she now had to do in the family. Her mother would insist upon sitting at the window in the bed-room, with Jessie in her arms, though she was herself so weak and poorly, and needed rest and quiet, as much, almost, as the poor child. Then there was the father's breakfast to be got ready, as well as Bobby's and Tommy's, whilst the two boys were to be kept from school for fear of spreading infection ; there was the kitchen to be tidied up, and the dinner to be thought of, for people must eat, even in the heaviest afflictions ; and Sarah was too well aware how important it was for the comfort of the whole family that everything should go on as usual, to permit herself to be idle for a single minute.

Fanny had been gone some time to her daily occupation at Miss Thorne's, a fashion-

able milliner, where she learned a great deal of harm in addition to the hard work she had to go through, so that she could be of no use in the house. In fact, Fanny never thought it was her duty to assist her step-sister in household work, considering herself more in the light of a lodger than as one of the family.

Sarah lost no time in lighting the fire and putting the kettle on, to boil water for breakfast, and then she set to work to make the kitchen tidy, and look as neat and bright as she could. This done, she ran up stairs and found that her mother was carrying Jessie in her arms up and down the room, and satisfied that the latter was not being neglected, she came down again to get the breakfast things arranged, the mugs of milk-and-water put ready for the two boys, and the tea brewed by the time Crisp's foot was heard on the doorstep.

The room looked so cheerful and bright, that for a moment his fears for Jessie were

put to flight; but his heart sank again when he caught the sad expression on poor Sarah's face.

"Has the doctor called, lass?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Yes, father."

"How long since?"

"More than an hour ago," Sarah replied.

"Well, and what did he say?" demanded Crisp.

"That Jessie's very sadly, father."

"That's bad. I heard as I came from the foundry that Sandifer's youngest boy was down with the fever, and bad as bad could be. Did the doctor say that Jessie had caught it?" he asked, almost fearfully.

"He said he feared so, father, and that has made mother very anxious for you to come back. She wants Bobby and Tommy to be sent away to uncle James's."

"They shall go at once. Mr. Gladstone will let me off this afternoon, so that I can take them. Is thy mother with Jessie?"

“ Yes, father.”

“ Then I’ll go up and see how my little darling is.” And Crisp went noiselessly up the stairs.

He found his wife sitting near the window with the poor child, tossing uneasily about, in her arms. Crisp could not hide from himself the danger of both mother and daughter, and felt it difficult to say which looked nearer death, the mother, with her pale, anxious face, or the child with the hectic flush on its cheeks, and brilliant eyes.

“ We must prepare ourselves for the worst, Mary,” William at length said, as he stooped and kissed his pet child’s forehead. “ She seems fearful bad.”

“ She does indeed, William. Feel how hot her hands are,” and Mrs. Crisp put the tiny fingers in his grasp. “ They are very hot, but they are not more so than all the rest of her body.”

Crisp felt a tear trickle down his rough cheek, as he took his wife’s hand in his, and

endeavoured to cheer her with the hope that Jessie might still struggle through her present illness.

“I will take the two lads to your brother’s this afternoon,” he said, a moment after. “God in his goodness and mercy may see fit to spare them, and take only our dear little innocent lamb here.”

“Oh! William, dear, don’t talk in that way,” cried his wife, weeping bitter tears. “I cannot, indeed I cannot part with her just yet. She was my last, and my heart clings more fondly to her.”

Crisp took down from a shelf the family Bible, in which his own age and that of his wife was recorded, along with all their children, and said—

“Mary, dost thou remember how King David bore the loss of the child that the wife of Uriah the Hittite bore to him? I will read it to you,” and slowly and painfully, with many sobs, Crisp read the beautiful and pathetic story, and when he had finished it,

he said, "Now, dear Mary, canst thou tell God that He must not take our dearly beloved bairn, if it seems good to Him?"

"I have been very wrong to speak as I have done, William," said his wife, with tears and sobs, "but it's hard to part with our dear one in that way. You men cannot feel such sorrow as a mother that has brought her children into the world with the pains of child-birth."

"Remember, Mary, my love, Jessie is still with us," said her husband mournfully, but calmly, "and the good and merciful God may yet have pity, listen to our prayers, and suffer the innocent one to continue with us."

"I will pray for her," said the wife eagerly. "Now, love, go down and get your breakfast, and leave Jessie and me together. Sarah can get all you want."

He kissed his wife in his rough, stern way, and went down stairs, for time was precious with him. When he stole up again, not many minutes after, his wife was on her

knees at the foot of Jessie's crib, fervently petitioning God for the life of the child, who was as dear to her as was the son of the inspired Psalmist.

“ Make thy mother take some breakfast, my love,” he said to Sarah on coming down stairs again, “ or she'll starve herself to death with nursing the poor bairn.”

CHAPTER V.

EVERY one in Braidsworth felt—despite the bright summer weather, that had now lasted much longer than the oldest person of the village could remember—that a cloud hung over the place, and the boldest amongst them trembled when they thought what might happen. And yet the weather was so delicious and so sunny it was scarcely possible to realise to yourself the existence of such widespread danger and such steadily approaching suffering—suffering in which Nature herself seemed quite unwilling to sympathise. It was only when you came into Braidsworth and met the sorrowful-looking countenances

of the people, which reflected the fear felt at their hearts, that you began to imagine they were not so prosperous and happy as might be supposed.

Some of the more active inhabitants of the village, William Gladstone amongst the rest, declared the houses were so over-crowded that it was almost impossible those who lived in them could be healthy; and to add to this sad state of things, there was scarcely a proper drain in the village, whilst two, three, and sometimes four families were packed together in a tenement that was scarcely large enough for one. The natural consequence was, that when any infectious disease attacked the neighbourhood the ravage it committed was fearful.

There were more persons than William Gladstone that morning who deemed it high time, if any good was to be effected, efforts should be made to get a visiting committee appointed. Dr. Smith said as much to his wife, who was very busily engaged tying

up her carnations whilst her husband was buttoning on his gaiters in the breakfast-room, the windows of which opened into the garden.

When such a scourge was stalking abroad, Dr. Smith above all others knew the necessity for the proposed precaution. He was a very skilful physician, and one in whom the people at large put implicit trust, although he was old-fashioned in his notions, somewhat fastidious, and liked to have his own way with every one.

Dr. Smith was a small man, with a powdered head, and a fresh, wholesome complexion, with eyes as keen as a hawk's. Mrs. Smith was pale, or rather delicately fair, with soft blue eyes, that must have been beautiful when she was younger. The doctor, as he left the room, came to her side and said—

“ My love, I wish you would walk up to the Rectory and see what Vinen intends doing about the visiting committee business. I shall not be back till late in the day, and

something must be done without an hour's delay."

Mrs. Smith gave over her gardening operations and put away her tools. You would have set her down as a very phlegmatic person, judging by the quiet way in which she did this, but she was, in truth, a thoroughly warm-hearted, true woman, and one of the most unselfish creatures it was possible for you to imagine.

"Don't wait dinner for me, my dear," said her husband, who seemed in a hurry to be off. "I have a long round this morning, as well as a great number of patients to visit, so it is quite impossible for me even to guess when I shall get home again," and he was off before she could reply,

Mrs. Smith immediately left the garden and went into the breakfast room, and as it was too early to go to the Rectory, she betook herself to her husband's easy chair. There could not well be a greater contrast in almost every point than Dr. Smith and his wife pre-

sented. This dissimilarity between husband and wife is by no means uncommon. I often think that the married life is made more happy when it exists than when it does not. The doctor was keen, quick, and decisive, both in thought and deed, caring for no one, and speaking his opinion in every company with a boldness that almost always carried conviction with it. His wife was gentle and timid, and at times almost oppressed by a strange diffidence that prevented her being so completely at home in society as her refined mind and cheering manners should have made her. She could not, in fact, entirely divest herself of that personal egotism that makes some people fancy their every word and action is noticed by those around them. So she sat wishing that some happy chance would prevent the necessity of her going by herself to the Rectory. She was rising reluctantly, with the intention of putting on her bonnet and shawl, for it was near eleven o'clock, when she heard the wicket

gate open and some one walk leisurely up the garden walk.

“ It is Miss Frances Gladstone, I declare,” was Mrs. Smith’s mental observation, as she peeped over a large geranium, and, running out into the passage, she met Frances.

“ My dear Miss Frances, I am so very glad to see you,” she exclaimed, holding her visitor’s soft hand in both her own, as she led her from the passage into the breakfast room. “ My husband wished me to go up to the Rectory this morning, and I was just wishing for some one to accompany me.”

“ I am going there myself,” said Frances, sitting down and taking off her bonnet. “ What a sultry day we are going to have!”

“ It must be very warm in the fields, I think,” said Mrs. Smith, whose usually pale face was flushed with pleasure. “ I suppose I may depend upon your going to the Rectory with me?”

“ Oh! certainly. William Crisp’s little girl, I understand, has caught the fever.”

“ My husband was sent for very early this morning to see the poor child. Is she very ill ? ”

“ I fear she is, from what my brother William says. Had we not better go to Dr. Vinen’s before Mrs. Vinen goes out ? ”

Mrs. Smith only needed a shawl and bonnet to be ready to set off, and these were put on in a minute, now that she had a companion —the one of all others she would have chosen ; a visit to the Rectory was a very pleasant duty ; her face was radiant with smiles, and she had so much to say, and said everything so prettily, that Frances could do little else than listen.

Braidsworth was a valuable living, and the Rectory grounds were much more extensive than a stranger would think, did he only see the long, rambling, ivy-clad house that stood in the midst of them. Dr. Vinen had taken possession of the living some forty years before, when the Rectory was thought a handsome house ; and with something of that

feeling which compels us to preserve untouched the memorials of early happiness, he would not permit any alteration to be made in it, excepting those which a rapidly increasing family compelled.

Of all his large family only one remained under the paternal roof, for the daughters had married early, and the sons were now spread over the four quarters of the globe. One of the former had married the eldest son of a neighbouring Squire, and the other three were settled in the West of England. Dr. Vinen's youngest daughter Amelia, a lively young lady of twenty, was the only child left in one of those happy households with the fortunate members of which everything seems to prosper.

“What a cultivated taste for flowers Mrs. Vinen has,” said Mrs. Smith, as they walked up the pathway to the house. “The lawns and walks always look so exquisitely neat, and yet you never see the gardener about the place.”

“ I think I can hear his shears clipping the hedge somewhere,” said Frances, stopping to listen.

“ I dare say you do, my love. Now, that turf, Miss Frances, looks just like a piece of green velvet.”

“ Yes, and I have no doubt is quite as soft to the foot. I believe Dr. Vinen expects his son, the Captain, will be home in the course of the week.”

“ Some one told me he expects to get another ship very soon; I’m sure, if the Lord High Admiral, or whatever they call him, knew what a fine manly fellow he is, he would give him one at once.”

This was Dr. Vinen’s youngest son, who had just returned from a foreign station, but had been detained in London since he landed in England, so that his family had not yet seen him.

“ He is not such a handsome fellow as Mr. Joseph Vinen,” continued Mrs. Smith, who had known all the Vinens from childhood,

“nor so full of fun as his brother Charles ; but he is a fine fellow for all that. Do you not think so, Miss Frances ?”

“It is so long since I have seen him,” said her companion, quietly, “that I almost forget—”

“How could you forget an old playfellow so easily ?” interrupted Mrs. Smith.

Frances blushed and smiled, as she said she supposed Captain Vinen would be very much altered, for he was quite a youth when he had last left the Rectory.

“He could not then be more than twenty, my dear, and he has been absent ten years.”

“A very long time to look back to,” said Frances, as they reached the house. “I think Mrs. Vinen will be in the breakfast room,” and she led the way there at once.

“Good morning, Mrs. Vinen,” Frances said, holding out her hand to the only occupant of the room, “I’ve brought Mrs. Smith to see you.”

“ I am very pleased to see you both, my dears,” said the Rector’s lady, rising to receive them with cheerful alacrity ; “ I was just dreading to go out this sultry morning, and now that you are both here I think I shall stay where I am.”

Mrs. Vinen was about sixty years old, but did not look so much, so gently had time laid his hand upon a figure which was still graceful, and a complexion that had almost the delicate bloom of a young girl. The face, it is true, was wrinkled, and the hair rather grey, but you scarcely noticed either in the vivacity of expression that continually displayed itself upon her countenance.

“ I will ring for Amelia,” she said, pulling the bell, and when a footman came to answer it, she desired him to tell Miss Vinen to come to her.

“ My husband desired me to speak to Dr. Vinen or yourself upon a rather urgent matter, dear Mrs. Vinen,” said Mrs. Smith, who felt

quite brave in Frances Gladstone's company. "He says the fever is beginning to shew itself in the village."

"So Doctor Vinen told me when he came in to breakfast this morning. I believe he intends to go round the parish to-morrow with Mr. Gladstone and Doctor Smith, if those gentlemen can spare him their time."

"Can we do nothing in the mean time?" Mrs. Smith asked.

"I think we had better wait until the gentlemen see what steps should be taken. Is not that your opinion?"

"How do you do, Frances?" said Miss Vinen, who entered the room at this juncture; "something very serious must be the matter, you are all looking so grave. My dear Mrs. Smith, what a long time it is since you were last here."

"Doctor Smith is so uncertain, and I dislike so much, Miss Amelia, to be out when he comes home," pleaded Mrs. Smith.

"Doctor Smith is a very disagreeable per-

son to need so much waiting on," said Amelia, who was plump and fresh-coloured like her father, and had a good deal of his firm, decisive manner. "I would not permit myself to become such a slave as you are, even to him."

Frances Gladstone laughed and Mrs. Smith blushed at this attack, and then looked at Mrs. Vinen, as if she wished to continue the conversation that Amelia's entrance had interrupted.

"Come this way with me, Frances," said Amelia, putting her arm round her friend's waist, and taking her by main force out of the room. "Mamma and Mrs. Smith are evidently set in for a long gossip, and I have a world of things to tell you about Alfred, who I fancy you know is coming home almost immediately; in fact, we expect him this week."

"How delighted you must be, Amelia."

"I am positively quite out of my senses," continued Miss Vinen, leading Frances across

the lawn into one of the shadiest and snuggest walks she could find. “I have a whole batch of his letters in my pocket somewhere, which I will read to you. Only think, how odd he should remember you, and odder still that he should desire to hear how you are, and whether you and Kate are married, and—”

“Oh! Amelia, how can you wonder at such silly things,” cried Frances, colouring.

“Nothing but the truth, my dear. Ahem! where is it?”

And Amelia sat down on the bench and began to run her eye rapidly over first one letter and then another of a packet she had pulled out of her pocket.

“He writes an abominable hand, as you may see, Frances. Poor Alfred never had any great vocation for pot-hooks and down strokes, and all these letters have been scrawled in such a hurry that really, what with blots and mistakes and badly-spelt words, it is next to impossible sometimes to detect his meaning.

Well, never mind, Frances, I can't find the sentence."

Frances smiled and stood watching her companion, who spoke with a voluble vivacity that made her look rather droll.

"Do you remember Alfred, Frances?" she asked, flinging back a profusion of dark curls from her forehead, and fixing her keen eye on her companion.

"I think I do."

"What was he like, pray?"

"Not exactly handsome."

"Frank looking, though?"

"I thought him so, Amelia, then, and he had what you may call a pleasant-looking face."

"Exactly," said Amelia, nodding her head, "and I picture him to myself just as you describe him. Go on."

"He was a manly young fellow of twenty when he left Braidsworth," said Frances, humouring her. "I recollect the day perfectly well."

“ And so do I, my dear. Your father had business in London, and went with Alfred all the way. My recollection of the whole occurrence is so vivid that I can scarcely believe ten years have intervened. I wonder what he will think of us all now.”

Frances thought in her own mind that he might think very little, if at all. Long absence weakens the bonds of affection so silently, and yet so surely, that few come back to their childhood’s home with the same warm, unselfish love they carried forth with them.

“ We are to have a regular gathering of the clan Vinen, in honor of Alfred’s return. The Morgans (these were the neighbouring squire, his son, and wife) come on Saturday, with a regular nursery of noisy brats. Then Ruth, and Elizabeth, and their foxhunting spouses, come as early next week as they can. Some of them are in India, the Arctic regions, and the deuce knows where.”

“ Where is that, Amelia ?”

“ I am sure I cannot tell, Frances,” said

Amelia laughing ; and she jumped up, and began to pace up and down the shady walk they had strayed into. “ If there is a black sheep in the clan, it is Sam, I think.”

“ I understood Mr. Sam Vinen was very rich ?”

“ I believe he is. I can’t tell you how many lacs of rupees they say his fortune is, but for all that he is rather tainted. I shall be in a regular fever, Frances, till Alfred comes.”

She looked in a fever then, as she walked rapidly up and down, past Frances, with her flushed cheeks, and kindling eye, humming snatches of tunes, and then breaking off again abruptly, to continue the conversation about her brother.

“ Do you know, Frances, somehow I feel as if Alfred belonged more to me than he does to any of the rest of the family. My other brothers were married, and scattered about the world long before I had emerged from the nursery, so that Alfred is the only one

I can remember who romped and played with me in real earnest. If the others ever condescended to do so, it was only a make believe."

"Then that will render you all the happier for his coming home," said her companion.

"Just so. I wish he had not been detained in London," said Amelia.

"Why so?"

"Because I should have liked to have had him all to myself, before the others arrive."

"Well, he may possibly arrive to-day," said Amelia.

Amelia shook her head, saying—

"I think that is impossible."

"Had we not better go back to the house, Amelia?" asked Frances. "Mrs. Smith, I fear, will think us very rude in remaining absent so long."

"I believe mamma intends to celebrate Alfred's return by a dinner party or something of the sort. What a pity it is not winter time."

“ Why so ? ”

“ Because we might have had a dance instead.”

“ Suppose you have the piano brought on to the lawn ? ”

“ A capital idea ! I will try and coax mamma to let your suggestion be carried out, and then we could have a dance by moonlight.”

“ And give us all our deaths of cold,” laughed Frances, who was not romantic enough to feel the poetry of this arrangement.

“ I should much prefer dancing in your drawing-room.”

“ You goose ! That is far too commonplace. No ! we will have it on the lawn.”

Mrs. Smith was tying the strings of her bonnet as the two friends re-entered the room, so their re-appearance was most opportune. She looked rather grave, and so did Mrs. Vinen, in comparison with the beaming look upon Amelia’s countenance ; but then the two elder ladies had been discussing a rather solemn subject, whilst Amelia’s discourse had

been all about balls, dinner parties, and the return of a brother, for whom she cherished a very affectionate attachment.

“ I will let you know, Frances, the moment he comes,” whispered Amelia, as she accompanied them through the hall. “ He cannot, I should think, be kept much longer in London. Now, don’t laugh, I’m sure he speaks very handsomely of you.”

CHAPTER VI.

MISS AMELIA VINEN had not an opportunity of keeping the promise she made at the end of the last chapter to Frances Gladstone, as Dr. Vinen walked into the breakfast-room at the Rookery, whilst all the family were at breakfast, and introduced with a beaming countenance his son Captain Vinen, first to William, and then to each of his sisters.

“ Took us all by surprise, young ladies !” cried the good clergyman, who looked as if he could have hugged them all, he was so happy, and so proud of Alfred, as he affectionately styled him. “ My wife and I were sitting

comfortably over the fire in my study last night—”

“ A fire, such a hot night as it was, sir !” exclaimed Kate, who was the only one that had her wits about her. “ Why, it was a real Indian heat !”

“ I always think it chilly at night, so the ladies indulge me with a fire in my study ; and as I was saying, my wife and I were sitting before it—after Amelia had gone to bed—talking of old times, as old folks will talk, when I heard carriage wheels crumping over the newly laid gravel, that the gardener had just put down in front of the house, and on going out, his lordship there was standing on the step as saucy as—what shall I say, Kate ?”

“ As Dr. Vinen,” she said with a laugh.

“ And very little I found either you or my mother altered, sir,” said his son. “ Are you married, Gladstone ?”

“ Not yet, Alfred,” said William, laughing.

“ Nor you, Miss Frances ?”

“ We are all as you see us,” said William, answering for his sisters. “ It is time enough yet for them.”

“ Frances was quite a little girl when I went to sea,” said Alfred, who had allowed his eyes to wander much more towards her than to either Kate or Sophia.

“ And now you find her a fine, well-grown young woman, eh, Alfred ?” said Dr. Vinen, taking off his hat, as he drew his chair to the table ; “ Miss Frances, may I trouble you for a cup of chocolate and a small piece of toast ?”

“ You breakfasted an hour ago, sir,” said the Captain, who did not understand how the rector could be hungry so soon.

“ You mean I should have breakfasted an hour since had you not spoiled my appetite with your bustling about. Mrs. Hannah’s chocolate is as good as her custards I think.”

“ You are so complimentary to Hannah, that I verily believe you intend to inveigle her away from us,” said Sophia.

“ She would not leave us,” said Kate, who was examining Captain Vinen very critically.

The Captain was not by any means handsome ; not even good-looking, but the expression of his face showed talent, goodness, and determination. The high forehead was fair, whilst the rest of the features were bronzed, as if by exposure to a tropical sun, and Kate was considerably puzzled as to which of his parents he bore the greater resemblance. Frances thought his frank good-humoured smile made his features almost handsome, whilst Kate overlooked that altogether. He had, both in face and person, that solid, substantial look, which, after all, is the best kind of stuff to carry its possessor bravely through the world.

“ How are things progressing in Braidsworth ?” he asked, drawing his chair nearer to William. “ I learn from my father you are, by many degrees, the most important person in the village.”

“ Important ! That dignity is accorded me because I employ the greatest amount of labour. In the present disturbed state of things, my position is by no means an enviable one.”

“ Is work plentiful ?”

“ No ; but labour is, and I see little chance of sufficient increased orders to enable the masters to employ the hands out of work.”

“ That’s bad,” said the Captain.

“ Yes ; and the employers are getting nervous and despairing, as they find themselves compelled to curtail their establishments, whilst the employed are daily becoming more discontented with the diminution of their earnings, and the small amount of money they carry home to their half-starving wives and children.”

“ How do those exist who have neither employment nor money ?”

“ On credit from the shops, as long as they can.”

“ And when that fails them ?”

William shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply.

“ Then I’m not come home before I’m wanted,” thought the Captain, watching his friend’s stern face for some time in silence ; afterwards he asked aloud, “ are you going to the foundry ?”

“ I had intended doing so, when you came in. Would you like to go ?”

“ If I should not be in your way.”

“ Not in the least.”

“ My father talks of calling on Dr. Smith.”

“ What for ?”

“ To arrange for making an inspection of the sanitary condition of the parish.”

“ A most desirable thing.”

“ Yes ; especially as I hear a virulent fever is stalking abroad, in addition to your other calamities.”

“ I’m afraid so,” said William.

“ I am going with Mr. Gladstone to his foundry, sir,” said the son, addressing his father. “ Will you accompany us as far as

Dr. Smith's, or shall we leave you to—to finish your breakfast."

"I have already finished, Mr. Impertinence," said the Doctor, with a smile.

"Then you will go with us?"

"Yes; for unless I go at once, the doctor will have gone out for the day," said the Rector, rising and putting on his hat.

"Come, Gladstone, let us be off."

"What a total change, the quietude that reigns here, after the bustle of the London streets," said the Captain, as they walked down the garden; "the silence is positively oppressive to my feelings."

"You like distraction, Alfred," said the Rector.

"I prefer the life of a great city, sir."

"Why?" asked his father.

"Because, to my mind, nothing can be more miserable than the constrained idleness of many of the shopkeepers in villages and rural country towns, which only brighten up into a sort of existence on market days."

“ I think you are right, Alfred,” said William.

“ I don’t think ; I know I am right,” was the reply.

“ Yes ; such an existence is not life—it’s a mocking dream,” rejoined his friend.

“ And it would be far better for men with such a fate to emigrate to the wilds of the forests of America, where, in the course of a few years, they might sit down in the midst of fields of ripening grain, that they have by industry and perseverance won from the primeval forests, and see their children gambolling round their knees.”

“ Well done, Alf!” exclaimed the Doctor, slapping him on the back.

“ It must be a heart-crushing task for a man with health and energy to be obliged to fall back upon the life of a country-town shopkeeper,” continued the Captain. “ A heart must be as hard as flint that does not break rather than submit to such a condition !”

“ Yet a vast number do submit to it,” said Gladstone, holding out his hand to Dr. Vinen as he bade him good-bye.

“ I shall most likely see you again before the day is over,” said the Rector, as he turned into Dr. Smith’s garden. “ Remember, Alf, we dine at two o’clock.”

Captain Vinen thought his friend Gladstone had no reason to complain of bad times, when he caught sight of the blazing foundry fires, and the number of busy workmen he could see through the open doors.

A man came from the foundry to meet Mr. Gladstone. The Captain fancied he knew him.

“ Can you spare me this afternoon, sir ?” said the man, addressing Mr. Gladstone with, what appeared to Alfred, great solemnity.

“ Certainly, William. Where are you going ?”

“ To Chilworth, sir, My youngest child has taken the fever, I fear, and is very bad, so Dr. Smith advised me to remove the two boys immediately.”

“ You need not come back after dinner then,” said Mr. Gladstone, kindly. “ Were the castings sent off ?”

“ Yes, sir, the first thing this morning. Mr. Deck sent to say he should want a few more brackets in the course of the week.”

“ Well, there’s plenty of time to see after them to-morrow, William. When did Dr. Smith see your child ?”

“ This morning, afore breakfast,” said Crisp, whose stern face would have looked emotionless at the moment, had it not been for the quivering of the lips. “ I’m unwilling to say ‘tis fever, but I can’t think it’s anything else ; the poor little thing is mortal bad.”

“ There goes as worthy a fellow as ever lived !” observed Mr. Gladstone to Captain Vinen, as Crisp walked away.

“ He looked somewhat morose, I thought,” said his companion.

“ Ah ! many would think him morose and

sullen, judging by his countenance and manner, but he is neither. What makes you look about so strangely, Alfred?"

"I fancied from what you said in the morning at breakfast, William, that I should find a deserted foundry."

"And you cannot conceal your surprise, that your imagination magnified the evil," observed his friend, with a smile.

"Just so."

"I am better off than most of my neighbours for the present," rejoined Gladstone, leading the way through a chaotic mass of every description of ironwork, from a gigantic furnace down to a lot of pig-troughs, that crowded the foundry-yard, until they reached the office-door.

"I have a tolerable amount of writing and planning to get through this morning," he continued bluntly, as if the ten years they had been separated had been unable to destroy the frankness that had formerly existed be-

tween them. “ Will you come up to ‘ The Rookery ’ to-night, if you are not better engaged ? ”

“ I dare not promise till I have paid my respects to everybody within visiting distance. I heard my mother and Amelia planning a small party for to-morrow night, in honour of the return of the prodigal son ; so that if we don’t meet before, I shall see you then. Good-bye for the present.”

Mr. Gladstone entered his office and drew forth his drawing-board with a sigh, for he had a presentiment that his labour on that particular job would be in vain, and even if he were paid for it, prices were so ruinously low, that manufacturers undertook their contracts more for the sake of keeping their men together than with an idea of profit in their transactions.

He spent the morning planning, calculating, and thinking over his own position and that of many of those with whom he had business transactions. By twelve o’clock he had

finished his plan and covered a couple of sheets of foolscap with calculations that were more than enough to make an indolent man's head ache, merely to look at ; but Gladstone smiled, almost a happy smile, for the labour of thinking and scheming had restored the tone of his nerves wonderfully.

He saw the last man out of the yard, and then, locking the office-door, he put the key in his pocket, and began retracing his steps homewards.

Frances was alone in the breakfast parlour, as he looked into the room in passing.

“ Are you disengaged to-morrow evening, William ? ” she asked, walking towards the door.

“ Why, Frances ? ”

“ Because we are all invited to drink tea at the Rectory to-morrow evening.”

“ Very well ; write and accept the invitation. Alfred told me something about it before he left me. Is dinner ready ? ”

“ It will be directly,” replied his sister.

“ Do you not think Alfred Vinen looks very old, William ?”

“ He does look older than most men of thirty, Frances ; but then great allowance must be made for the wear and tear of the tropical climate in which the last ten years of his life have been spent. I am very glad he has come home just at this particular juncture.”

“ Why ?”

“ Because he will make himself of use. If a riot should take place, where could we get such another cool-headed and bold-hearted fellow ?” was her brother’s rejoinder.

“ William does expect a riot, then,” thought Frances, as she went into the kitchen to hurry Hannah with the dinner. “ How unhappy this continual anticipation of a coming evil makes me ! I wish my dear brother was not quite so bold and unyielding,” and as she attended to domestic duties she tried to forget his words and the look that accompanied them, but in vain.

CHAPTER VII.

SOPHIA GLADSTONE scarcely ever left the two rooms which comprised her world, so that William and his two younger sisters only were expected at the Rectory the following evening.

“There is the new number of the ‘Edinburgh,’ cut ready for you, Sophy,” said Frances, as she stood, bonnet in hand, beside Sophia’s sofa, waiting for her companions; “and there’s the ‘Antiquary’ as well; but I hope you won’t dip into that, for you know I promised to read it to you, and I will commence in the morning, if you will leave it until then.”

“The ‘Edinburgh’ will be quite enough for my invalid appetite,” returned Sophia, good-humouredly. “I must read as much as I can to-night, for Uncle Newman will send over for it in the morning. Was it not kind of him to give me the ‘Antiquary’ and ‘Waverley,’ with my name written on the blank leaf?”

“Very kind; but you know you are his heiress,” said Frances, “so it’s no wonder he spends a portion of his money in luxuries for you. There is William calling for me, down-stairs. God bless you, dear!” and, with a loving kiss, Frances ran off.

Let us change the scene to an hour or two after the party had left “The Rookery.” The moon is rising, round and red, over Braidsworth Church. The drawing-room of the Rectory is full of company, and from the numerous groups into which Mrs. Vinen’s friends have divided themselves proceeds that pleasant hum of many voices which shows that all are comfortably at ease and happy.

Standing against one of the windows William Gladstone is chatting with Amelia Vinen and another young lady, between whom he distributes his animated and lively conversation. The rest of the party, at times, catch a low laugh, or a smothered remonstrance from one or other of them, till the conversation sinks into a whisper as Kate Gladstone is singing, but soon rises again into the former pitch of gaiety.

“ Mamma was saying some very ugly things of you the other day, Mr. Gladstone,” said Amelia’s companion, turning a pair of lovely bright eyes upon him as she spoke. “ In days o’ auld lang syne you used to call and show yourself at Sunnyside once a fortnight at farthest, but now she has discovered that it is four months since you did us that honour.”

“ I am so very much engaged now,” said William, a little embarrassed, “ and besides you know, Miss Coulson, I had business in that neighbourhood at the time you speak of.”

“ Heigho ! one would imagine ‘ Sunny-side’ lay sixty miles at least from ‘ The Rookery,’ ” said she mischievously, “ and, in truth, I disbelieve your very paltry subterfuge so much, that I lay my commands upon you to drive Kate and Frances over on Tuesday next.”

“ If I can conveniently leave home, Miss Agatha, I shall be most happy to obey you,” said William, bowing.

“ There must be no ‘ifs’ in the case ; you must come—I insist upon your coming, and you know, Mr. Gladstone, the penalty every one pays who disobeys my commands. I shall invite this impetuous young lady here,” touching Amelia, “ and a few more quiet, sober folks to meet you ; and, remember, I wish it to be a long, happy day, so you must rise with the sun.”

“ I am a wretched riser,” said Amelia, shrugging her shoulders.

“ One of your bad habits, Amelia, which I hope to cure in time,” rejoined Miss Coulson.

“ It should be a ‘ perfect cure’ if I had you at ‘ Sunnyside’ for a week. I know you rise with the lark, Mr. William.”

“ In winter ?” asked Amelia, with a laugh.

“ No, in summer, Miss Impudence,” said Miss Coulson.

“ How did you discover that ?” enquired Mr. Gladstone.

“ We were driving through Braidsworth very early, not long since, to catch the Halifax mail. It was not six o’clock, and I saw you standing at your foundry gate, watching the workmen going in. See, they are forming a quadrille.”

“ What ! the workmen ?” interrupted Amelia.

“ Silly girl,” laughed Miss Coulson. “ Come, let us join them,” and she turned away, followed by Amelia.

Mr. Gladstone did not move ; he did not dance ; and somehow he always fell into a reverie after he had been in Agatha Coulson’s company. Without being as beautiful as his

sister Kate, or so brilliant in conversation as Amelia Vinen, the ever-varying expression of her fair sweet face had an indescribable charm for him which he did not care to analyse. A profusion of sunny curls shaded a face, the bloom of which came and went as fitfully as the sunshine on an April day, and the gazer was puzzled to decide whether the rose or the lily had the preference, whilst her figure was as lithe and graceful in its taller proportions as that of Kate was small and fairy-like.

Leaning against the window, Mr. Gladstone thought it pleasant to recall her image as she had looked only a few short minutes before, with the flush of pleasure on her cheek, whilst the tones of her musical voice still vibrated on his senses. No one enjoyed pleasure more keenly than himself; the more keenly, perhaps, because it lifted him for a brief space above the stern reality of that life which seemed to be darkening so rapidly round him.

After a time he perceived a movement amidst the various groups, as if some fresh amusement had been proposed. Alfred Vinen walked to one of the windows that opened to the ground, and throwing it up led Frances Gladstone out upon the moonlit lawn.

“A walk by moonlight! What a delightful notion!” Mr. Gladstone exclaimed, as moving forward he perceived Miss Coulson sitting on a couch by herself.

“The night is so very mild, Miss Agatha, that I don’t think it possible you can catch cold,” he said, as he offered her his arm, which she took with the prettiest pleased smile imaginable.

The Rectory garden looked beautiful in the soft, mellow light, and both William and his companion felt its full influence as they rambled, now in light and now in shade, through the grounds, talking gaily and pleasantly of the fête Agatha intended giving the following week.

Agatha was an heiress, and “Sunnyside,”

which she would become mistress of in about twelve months, was worth nearly two thousand a-year.

“ Was Miss Gladstone too great an invalid to come ; and could she not be coaxed to venture as far as ‘ Sunnyside ’ next Tuesday ? ” she asked.

Her companion said he could not tell ; but would try and persuade her, if her presence would give pleasure to their old friends.

Agatha said she was sure Mrs. Coulson would be delighted, and, for herself, she loved all his sisters.

William thought how pleasant it was to listen to her soft, silvery voice, as she talked on, passing from one topic to another, with a grace that was all her own.

“ You will see a great improvement at ‘ Sunnyside ’ since you were there last. The vines have quite covered the porch, and the sycamore tree on the lawn now throws a shade all the way to the dining-room window ; but I fear mamma has faded a little of late,” she

said, and a tone of sadness mingled itself with her voice.

“I fear Mrs. Coulson exerts herself too much in visiting the poor people down in the village.”

A sweet smile swept over his companion’s face as he said this.

“If Miss Gladstone comes on Tuesday, we shall insist on keeping her a few days. Much company exhausts mamma, but the companionship of a friend like your sister always cheers her.”

William thanked her again, and then she ran on with great volubility about the persons she would invite for Tuesday, and presently, before they were aware of it, they were in the midst of a group, who, led on by Kate and William Wilding, were actually dancing on the lawn. Agatha was too much an object of attraction to be allowed to remain an idle spectator, and Mr. Donald Lane, a dashing young squire, took her off before William was scarcely aware that she had relinquished his arm.

At no great distance there was a cool, shady walk, to which he strolled, and, with his hands folded behind him, fell into a delicious dream, in which Agatha was the leading actor. How genial would a home be with such a wife, where with a nice ordered regularity every day would have its appointed duties, and where they could read together his favourite books by the cheerful fire in winter, or ramble over hill and dale in the summer evening. There are few who indulge not in anticipations of this sort, and there are fewer still whose minds such reflections do not purify from the atmosphere of selfishness with which they would otherwise be surrounded.

Mr. Gladstone had not the slightest notion how long he had continued in dream-land, until he was suddenly awakened by his sister Kate coming suddenly up to him, saying that the whole party were going into supper. Taking his arm, she led him into the house.

Miss Coulson was already seated near the head of the table, too completely hemmed in.

by the hungry dancers for him to have a chance of getting a seat near her, even if he could by any means dispose of Kate. The latter, however, soon found someone to talk with, leaving her brother at liberty to amuse himself in any way that pleased him.

“I understand Miss Coulson is to be married in the winter,” said a gentleman at his elbow; “she has a handsome fortune, you know?”

William gave himself a shake, and stammered out a confession of his ignorance on both points.

“Do you know the name of the gentleman to whom Miss Coulson is engaged?” he asked.

“A clergyman in the West or South, I believe,” replied his companion, “a distant relative of some sort.”

A jealous pang touched William Gladstone’s heart as he listened to the explanation. The next moment an incredulous smile came over his, before, stern face, as he ventured to ex-

press his doubts of the accuracy of such a rumour.

“I never heard that Miss Coulson had any relatives, except her mother; if she has, I think my sisters and I should have heard of them some time or other during our very long intimacy.”

“You, perhaps, have equal misgivings as to her fortune, sir?” said the other, in a somewhat sarcastic tone.

“On that point I have never made enquiry,” said William, curtly. “I believe, however, Miss Coulson is entitled to be considered a Yorkshire heiress.”

“Oh! indeed; your great intimacy, sir, has probably informed you of that fact,” rejoined the other, with a sneer.

William smiled with phlegmatic unconcern. Petty malice, such as the other betrayed, rarely disturbed his well-regulated mind, and as he rose from table, he encountered his sisters, promenading down the room, with Agatha between them.

“Kate and Frances have both promised to come to ‘Sunnyside’ on Tuesday,” said Agatha, with much vivacity.

“And you must not disappoint us, William,” rejoined Kate, with one of her most beseeching looks.

“You need not disturb yourself,” said Frances, in her quiet manner, “I will promise to bring him safely out.”

“It would punish you all properly,” he laughingly retorted, “if I did not go.”

They went into the drawing-room again, where a few of the ladies had re-assembled, whilst the majority were preparing to depart.

Agatha sat down on a sofa near which Mr. Gladstone was standing, whilst Kate and Frances were putting on their shawls and bonnets.

“Dr. Vinen tells me,” she said, “fever has broken out in Braidsworth.”

“I regret to say it has,” rejoined William.

“Is it of a very malignant description?” she asked.

“ I fear it is.”

“ Do you think it likely to spread ?” she enquired, anxiously.

“ Yes, unfortunately there is scarcely any employment for the working people, and I have always found when they are poorly fed they are more liable to disease than when work is plentiful and they are enabled to obtain proper nourishment.”

As he said this he watched his companion’s intelligent and beautiful face, and was gratified to find it assumed a sorrowful expression.

“ However,” he said, the next moment, “ we have made excellent sanitary arrangements, to be enforced by a visiting committee, besides taking other steps to endeavour to stay the scourge as far as human means can do. The rest we must leave in the hands of God.”

“ I hope you will not run unnecessary risks, for your life is of the utmost importance to your sisters, and—”

“ To whom else ?” he asked, with an apparent carelessness.

Miss Coulson began to pick her bouquet in pieces as she answered—

“To very many; to—your workmen—to—”

Mr. Gladstone both looked and felt gratified. At that moment, wrapped up as carefully as if about to brave the regions of a Lapland winter, his sisters approached them.

Miss Coulson kissed them both, saying—

“Don’t forget Tuesday, and mind you all come very early”

Then, holding out her hand to William, bade him good-night.

The charm of her presence did not end with the leave-taking. The gentleman was silent and abstracted for more than half the way home, until he was aroused from his dreams by something that Frances said concerning Miss Coulson.

“Miss Coulson!” he echoed, on catching the name; “be good enough, my dear Frances, to repeat what you were saying about her.”

“ My dear brother, I have asked the question thrice already,” she said, rather impatiently.

“ You know how absent I am sometimes,” he said, laughing.

“ Did you hear that she was engaged and about to be married ?” asked Frances, who was making her own observations on his unusual manner.

“ Yes, I did hear something about it,” he replied, so carelessly that his sister was quite deceived, “ to a clergyman, I understand.”

“ Yes ; I wonder we should never have heard of it till to-night.”

“ You forget how little you have been at ‘ Sunnyside ’ of late,” he said. “ You have not seen Miss Coulson for months ; and she lives so secluded a life that people about here have almost forgotten her.”

“ I should say, William, that Agatha Coulson is a person that no one could forget,” observed Frances.

“ I quite agree with you,” rejoined her

brother, emphatically ; “she would make any man an admirable wife—equally good with yourself, Frances,” he said, affectionately.

“I wonder who this clergyman is,” observed Kate.

“I cannot tell. I never heard of any relative she had in either the west or the south,” rejoined her brother.

“Nor I; neither can I imagine Agatha subsiding into a parson’s wife.”

“Why not?” demanded her brother.

“I think she is too energetic to be happy in such a quiet sphere; she would, in fact, prefer to be united to a man who had more active duties than those of a clergyman.”

“My dear girl, a clergyman’s sacred office is the highest and noblest a good man can fill; he is the king of his little flock, as were the patriarchs of old.”

“You misunderstand me, William; Agatha has not the temperament that would permit her to be happy with such a lot before her; take yourself, for instance.”

“ Well.”

“ Your business gives you the opportunity of conferring happiness or misery on numerous families to whom you give employment ; with moderate good fortune, in ordinary times, you might acquire for yourself power that would place at your disposal the happiness of hundreds. Agatha would assist one situate as you are in such a work, and with such a man would be perfectly happy. Now don’t laugh, William, for I am right. I have studied Miss Coulson thoroughly, and that is the conclusion at which I have arrived. If she marries this gentleman I tremble for her.”

“ Suppose, then, Frances,” said her brother, earnestly, “ we tell her all this on Tuesday ; we will forewarn her of the stagnant misery she will embrace in being the wife of an excellent worthy man, but who has the present misfortune to be a clergyman, and that her only chance of happiness lies in uniting herself with some poor wretch of a manufacturer

who scarcely knows how to make ends meet, and on that score one William Gladstone would be a very eligible individual. Well, will that do?"

"Nonsense, William."

"Nonsense, Frances," echoed her brother, laughing. "No, no, my dear girl, let Agatha Coulson mate herself where she pleases, for it's no business of ours."

"She will never be happy, I am certain," said Frances.

"Pho ! pho ! you absurd child ; a sensible person will be happy in any situation in life, and placed at the head of a pleasant country parish, Agatha Coulson will deserve her fate if she cannot extract happiness from her lot. I'm afraid Sophy will not be able to make one of the party to Sunnyside."

"Poor, dear Sophy," said Frances, affectionately ; "how cheerfully she bears her heavy burden. Summer and winter fulfil their course in vain for her. I think, brother, I

should very soon die if I could not imbibe the bracing air of October, and the balmy brightness of June."

"And so should I, Frances," rejoined her brother. "No one ought utterly to despair until the glories of summer, and the wild sublimities of winter are a sealed book to him; and yet, with her books and flowers, poor Sophy is very happy."

"Thank God that we can make her so," rejoined Frances, solemnly, "and may He grant that we may always be enabled to afford her these simple luxuries. Years hence, when you and Kate have little children about your knees, Aunt Frances, a happy old maid, will live in some retired cottage near you, tending the fragile and happy invalid whose sad misfortune arose from the love she bore the child Frances years before. It was not until our dear mother was on her death-bed she ever trusted me with the secret she had so long kept locked in her own breast."

"But Sophy knew it."

“She did William ; but with that noble, self-denial she always displays, she never breathed a hint to any of us. Our beloved mother made me promise that Sophia should always be near me, during our mutual life-time.”

“It was a terrible accident,” said William, after a pause, in a hushed voice. “The poor pony, half mad with terror, flying towards the frightful precipice with you, a shrieking child, upon its back, and Sophy, a bold, brave girl, dragged over hedge and ditch by the bridle, without strength to stay its mad career, our mother fainting with terror—and our father—”

“Thank God that his botanising inclination brought him to the spot at such a critical moment,” said Frances, more than usually agitated. “Oh ! William, how in such incidents Providence displays His power.”

“True, indeed, dear Frances,” said her brother.

“I never understood till our mother was

on her death-bed," said Frances, more cheerfully, "the reason Sophy was so looked up to, and almost reverenced by our parents ; it was more like the dutiful homage a pupil pays to a beloved preceptor, than the affection of parents to a favourite child."

"But when you knew all," added William, "you could not surely wonder, Frances, that Sophy should receive so much attention."

"Certainly not ; and as her misfortune happened through me, I am doubly bound to her service. How very much Kate and William Wilding loiter behind," Frances said.

"I hear them at the gate," rejoined her brother, as he walked leisurely up the field to "The Rookery." "There's Sophy's lamp burning in the little dressing-room."

"She is sitting near the window, looking for us," said Frances, whose keen sight detected the small, slight figure thrown into strong relief by the lamp burning on the table behind. "I desired Hannah to place plants

on the window ledge that she might see them early in the morning.”

“I wish Kate was as thoughtful,” said William, who had often tried, but in vain, to curb Kate’s light-hearted gaiety. “The more I say to her, however, the worse she seems to get.”

She certainly did; as most high-spirited young women will, when spoken to in the blunt manner William used towards his merry sister. As long as he remained in the room Kate’s spirits rose to a most exuberant pitch, but when her brother left the apartment she would steal to her own room, and sob bitterly with vexation.

Miss Gladstone received them with her usual gentle welcome.

“Did you not think us very long absent?” asked Frances, pulling off her bonnet.

“Not at all. I had a very pleasant companion in the ‘Edinburgh,’ ” said Sophia.
“Will not William Wilding come in?”

“He went away directly he saw me enter the house,” said Kate, sitting down upon a couch and fanning herself with her handkerchief; then, after a pause, “I think Agatha Coulson a far more charming girl than Amelia Vinen, Frances; don’t you?”

“Was Agatha Coulson of your party?” asked Miss Gladstone.

“Yes; and has invited us all to go to Sunnyside on Tuesday,” added Kate, with her very light-hearted laugh, “and you to go with us. You must try to feel well enough to join us, Sophy.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE child was still lying on its mother's knees when William Crisp returned from his long, weary walk. He was both faint and hungry, and ill at heart as well. His first act was to go up to where his wife was sitting, patient and wretched in her grief, listening to those around, prescribing for poor little Jessie ; but it was easy enough to see that she was alike insensible to everything but the one dear object that was breathing out its little life in her arms.

“ I scarcely thought to find the poor, dear child alive,” said William, in a husky voice ; “ sweet lamb, how heavy her breathing is.”

“Herb tea is the best thing you can give the poor child,” said one of the neighbours.

“With a few snails steeped in it,” said a second.

“My bairn shall drink none of such stuff,” growled Crisp.” “Sarah, my lass, step down to thy aunt Salmon and ask her to come up; and now, my friends, it’s drawing on to the time ye should all be in bed, for most of you have work to do in the morning.”

Several voices were heard indignantly refusing to go to bed, whilst they “could do a neighbour a good turn in any way.”

“It doesn’t signify,” retorted Crisp, waxing wrath, “I don’t want you in my house, so good night all of ye,” and in a few minutes he saw the house cleared of his zealous, but unwelcome, guests.

Crisp’s tea was still hot on the hob. He had been so sick with alternate hopes and fears at Chilworth, that his appetite had entirely failed him, notwithstanding all the country dainties which his sister-in-law had

placed before him with such lavish prodigality. Now, however, he felt so faint and thirsty, that he was thankful that Sarah's forethought had prompted her to put it aside for him.

“ Give Jessie to me a bit, my lass,” he said, after he had finished his tea. “ Poor dear ; we little thought she would be stricken so soon.”

Mrs. Crisp kissed the little pale cheek, as she placed the sufferer in her husband's arms.

“ She moaned so in bed,” she said, in a whisper, that “ I hadn't the heart to keep her there any longer.”

“ Poor child ! Death wrestles hard with her,” he rejoined, with sadness.

“ Yes ; some undergo greater suffering than others,” said Mrs. Crisp.

“ I'm thankful the two boys are out of harm's way.”

“ How did you find my brother and his good wife ? ” she asked, after a lengthened pause, during which the heavy breathing of

the child was the only sound that broke the stillness of the room.

“Quite hearty, and very busy stacking and mowing. That farming is a wonderful thing ! You used to be a good hand at hay-making.”

“I was once, William,” said his wife, with a sickly smile.

“I’ve often grieved, my dear love, that I ever took you from your happy home,” pursued Crisp, with a deep-drawn sigh, “this nasty, close room must have looked heavy and dull, after pleasant Chilworth.”

With a half-smothered cry, the wife arose, and flung her arms around his neck, kissing his forehead and lips with a fervour that told him how needless were his fears.

“I must have made you a very repining wife, if you could harbour such thoughts of me,” she said, sitting down beside the child.

“Say no more, my lass,” rejoined William, as Sarah returned with Mrs. Salmon.

“How’s your husband, Bess ?”

“Only middling, William, thank’ee,” said

Mrs. Salmon, taking off her bonnet. “ Eh, dear, how shocking bad I turned when Sarah, poor body, came down our path, with the news that my precious one there had taken the fever.”

“ And shocking bad she is,” said the father, in a low voice. “ I have just been telling my poor woman that I have but little hope of her struggling through with it.”

“ Well, it’s a great consolation that a young, innocent thing like that cannot have committed sin,” said Mrs. Salmon, throwing in a word by way of comforting the sorrowing parents. “ I suppose, William, the doctor has seen her?”

“ Hours ago,” rejoined William. “ Sarah, you and your mother had better go to bed, as you must both be fairly worn out. Bess and I will take it by turns to sit up with the bairn.”

“ I cannot go to bed, William,” said his wife, who was watching every movement of the suffering child with deep earnestness.

“ Let Bess and me sit up. I’m sure you want rest, after such a walk as you have had.”

“ Oh, nonsense, Mary,” retorted her husband, obstinately.

“ You must—”

“ Must,” cried the husband, “ am I master in this house, or art thou ?”

“ You, certainly, William.”

“ Then, I order both you and Sarah to go to bed. When you’re gone I’ll get a wink or two of sleep ; but a poor, ailing body like you must not be deprived of sleep.”

She seemed to submit, for she did not persist further ; but kissing Jessie’s white, shrivelled lips, suffered herself to be led away to bed by her daughter, who would willingly have sat up with Mrs. Salmon if she had dared ; but her father’s resolution prevented her venturing to suggest such an arrangement.

“ Poor little thing !” said the father, with a rough sort of tenderness, after his wife and daughter had left the room, “ she seems very

uneasy, and I think, Bess, we must try and get her into the crib again."

"Sarah told me as we came along how very restless poor Jessie had been, and that you had been obliged to take her up," said Mrs. Salmon, who was busy making some barley-water by the fire. "However, we can try, and it's only taking her up again if she won't take to it."

"Light a candle then, and come up with me; make no noise, or we shall have Mary here again."

When they placed her in her crib, the little hands folded, as they had been made to do from infancy, and Jessie's weak, childish voice was heard repeating the simple prayer her mother had taught her.

"Sing, Sarah dear," she said the next moment, as she caught a glimpse of her aunt, who, in the dim light, she mistook for her sister.

After a short pause Jessie continued—

"Now, Sarah dear, let me lay my hot cheek

on your breast, for I'm very weary," murmured the child, holding out her little hands to the dark figure she saw before her.

"Let her have her will," whispered the father; "lie down beside her, Bess, and let her put her poor little head on thy breast, as she wishes."

Mrs. Salmon took to her bosom the fevered head that lay tossing on the uneasy pillow.

Jessie then seemed to sink into a placid slumber, murmuring at intervals the names of Sarah and her brother Tom, who was her particular favourite. A lock of Mrs. Salmon's black hair had got loose from the ribbon that tied it up, and this the child held in her little thin hand, as she slumbered on her bosom.

"You had better go and lie down, William, I think," said Mrs. Salmon, in a whisper, "the bairn is dreaming away, poor little dear, and you can do no good sitting here."

"I'm getting a bit drowsy," said Crisp, "and if thou'l't promise to call me between

twelve and one o'clock, I'll go and lay down on the lads' bed."

She gave the required promise, and William crept away. Another hour stole on, and still the child slept. The time would have seemed long to any one but Mrs. Salmon, for the stillness of the room and the gloomy feelings the time naturally induced was sufficient to weary most people. The good, honest creature, however, cared for none of these; it was sufficient that the child slept, and painful as was the position she was compelled to remain in, she would have lain there till morning had it been requisite.

After a time Mrs. Salmon caught a sound of something stirring on the stairs without, and she felt very frightened for a moment as the thought struck her that it was probably Fanny, who she knew had not been at home since the morning. Mrs. Salmon really feared Fanny, whose haughty disposition she could not at all understand, and she felt half in-

clined to call up Crisp. Then the thought that by so doing she would arouse Jessie, struck her, and she remained quiet and listened.

It was fortunate that she did so, for the door was softly opened the next moment, and something white and tall, like a ghost, came in.

“Oh ! Mary, how you frightened me,” she said in a whisper, on seeing it was Mrs. Crisp. “I could think o’ nothing but that it was Fanny coming in. I hope you don’t intend staying out of your warm bed.”

The mother went up to her child, and Bess saw her thin, blue lips move as she caught the placid smile that seemed to rest like a shadow upon the wasted cheek.

“I must watch with you, Bess,” she said, with an energy totally new to her. “I remained in bed till poor Sarah was sound asleep, and then I got up and came here, for I cannot sleep ; I will be very quiet, and you must not tell William.”

The poor thing clasped her pale, trembling hands with such an imploring look that Mrs. Salmon could not have refused for the world.

“But you must be off again before he gets up,” said Bess, after a pause. “He ordered me to call him at one o’clock.”

“ ’Tis a long time till then,” said Mrs. Crisp in her quiet tone. “I will do everything you wish me; and now tell me honestly—do you think the bairn will live?”

Mrs. Salmon was thankful that the poor mother could not feel the fevered cheek that was at that moment lying on her own breast. She looked wistfully at the pale face that appeared so unearthly amidst the white garments Mary Crisp wore, and her heart smote her so that she could not say the words she knew to be the truth.

“Don’t kill me outright, Bess,” said the poor creature, whose eyes shone with a wild light, and whose pale cheeks flushed hectic as she spoke; “something tells me that I am a dying woman.”

“ Whisht ! Mary, love.”

She shook her head, and one heart-rending sob burst from her as she said—

“ I once thought how pleasant it would be in one’s old age to have one’s bairns about one’s knee, and to live out the bit remnant of life with William, near where one was born ; but that’s all passed and gone, and I only wish now for the quiet rest in Braidsworth churchyard. If it wasn’t for the bairns, Bess, I would pray to God to take me this very night.”

“ Mary, you shock me,” said Mrs. Salmon, quite aghast at such language ; “ it’s positively wicked.”

“ God forgive me if it is,” she said, in her quiet despair. “ I have been sorely afflicted ; but I’m travelling fast to a country where there will be no more sorrow nor want ; but the poor bairns trouble my spirit sadly. That poor, sickly thing on thy breast, Bess, and Tommy and Bobby are all so young ; and then when I’m down in sickness sometimes in

bed I cry for hours, thinking that William's dread of losing work will some day come to pass ; and then—then what will become of them when I'm gone ?”

Her tears were falling like an April shower now, and Mrs. Salmon was thankful that they did, for it would do her good. She let her cry for a considerable time without offering to stop her, and then she said—

“ Mary, did it never strike you that other poor folks love their children as well as thou ?”

Mrs. Crisp lifted her head with a bewildered and sorrowful look, as if she did not understand what was said.

“ Just think of me,” said Bess, quietly ; “ my good man is a poor, weakly creature, that can scarcely do a good day's work if he can get it ; and that's a terrible drawback to a wife with ten bairns. You have only four, and a strong, steady husband to work for them into the bargain.”

Mary raised herself, but did not speak. Bess went on more boldly—

“ As to any harm coming to the poor things, that’s what none of us will allow for a single instant, so you may safely put that sorrow aside. Sarah is a good, tidy lass, with a steady, sober way with her that would do credit to any woman twice her age, and she could keep her father’s house as tidy and lightsome as yourself or anyone else ; so you needn’t fret yourself about that part of the business.”

“ But the lads, Bess ?”

“ They will earn their bread in due time. Is that Crisp stirring ?”

“ God forbid ! it cannot be one o’clock yet,” whispered Mrs. Crisp, standing up and listening.

“ It can’t be very far short on’t. You had better go to bed, there’s a good creature,” said Mrs. Salmon, in a coaxing way.

“ If you don’t think he’ll be coming yet, I’d rather not,” said her companion, in a pleading manner.

“ He cannot be long now, and he’ll be

dreadfully angered if he finds you here, Mary," said the other in an earnest manner. "Come, come, kiss the dear child and go to bed at once, there's a dear."

The mother suffered herself to be persuaded, and, heaving another sigh, she stole away in her white dress to her bed again.

"Poor thing! I wonder how she can live with such ideas eating away her life," thought the kind-hearted watcher, as William Crisp stole into the room a few minutes after his wife had left.

CHAPTER IX.

A TROUBLE hard to bear lay heavy on Sarah's spirit during Jessie's sickness, that neither her father nor mother, completely immersed as they were in anxiety for the life of their sick child during that mournful period, had time to think about.

Fanny had left her home on the morning Jessie was taken ill, and from what had dropped from the neighbours she encountered on her errands, and from another source which we shall mention presently, Sarah feared greatly that she had gone away in some one's company. What surprised the poor girl more than all the rest was, that Miss Thorne had

not sent to enquire after her ; and this circumstance, trifling as it was, gave Sarah courage to hope that Fanny, anxious to spare the trouble she gave at such a time, or afraid of infection, had taken a lodgings in Bradford, and was still working at the dress-making.

This hope, however, slight as it was, was dispelled two nights afterwards in the following manner :—The mother of Harry Jobson, whom William Crisp acknowledged to be “making up to” his daughter Sarah in his interview with Mr. Gladstone, had come down from the far end of the village, partly to see if she could render any assistance to the Crisps in their hour of trouble, and partly to have a gossip with Sarah herself, the latter being her especial favourite. Sarah was in the kitchen alone, Mrs. Crisp and a neighbour being upstairs with Jessie during her husband’s absence, and there was a bright gleam in her eye for a moment as she saw Harry’s mother pass the window and open the door.

“ You’re kindly welcome, Mrs. Jobson,” she said warmly, as her visitor kept rubbing her feet on the door mat. “ Don’t be afeared about making a little dirt, but come in at once and sit down.”

“ Thank’ee, Sarah, dear ; but I don’t like to make dirt on such a tidy floor,” rejoined Mrs. Jobson, sitting down. “ How is poor little Jessie to-night ?”

“ Oh ! only very middling,” was Sarah’s mournful answer, as she kept rubbing a plate she had been washing, whilst an odd bashfulness seemed to have taken possession of her all of a sudden ; “ indeed, Mrs. Jobson, it’s a sore trial for us all.”

“ It is one we have all to bear,” sighed Mrs. Jobson, who, being a widow, had had her own troubles ; “ and where are the two lads ?”

“ At Chilworth.”

“ When did they go ?”

“ Father took them away at once, for fear they should take the fever.”

“ And left you alone, my dear, to run the risk of infection.”

“ I couldn’t leave mother, so ill as she is, with Jessie to nurse,” said Sarah, somewhat indignantly. “ Father never thought of my going, I’m certain.”

“ There was another that did though, Sarah,” said Mrs. Jobson, significantly ; “ one that never seems to have had a wink of sleep ever since Jessie took ill, for fear you would catch fever too.”

Sarah blushed a bright scarlet, and in a moment after grew pale again, as she said—

“ I’m sorry that anyone should disturb themselves so about me, Mrs. Jobson.”

“ That you are not, Sarah,” retorted the other, with a smile ; “ and no wonder he frets, with his sweetheart in such danger. Harry is a fine, noble fellow, my lass, and she’ll be a happy woman that gets him for a husband, and he’ll be a lucky fellow that weds my bonny Sarah, too.”

“ Mother,” said Sarah, using a term of

endearment she had often applied in childhood to old Mrs. Jobson, just as Harry used to call William Crisp father, “ I don’t deserve your Harry ; and I think it would be a hard thing for anyone to step in between him and you, who have had the up-bringing of him.”

“ Yes, Sarah, it’s a bitter thing for a mother to see her son, that she has brought into the world with so much sorrow, and that has had so many sleepless nights and weary days about him, leave the home that has sheltered him from his birth, and all for the glances of some bright eye or painted cheeks, and sorely should I fret if that was all my Harry looked to ; but, thank God ! he thinks of something above that, and next to the girl he makes his wife, I’m quite certain he thinks of making his old mother’s last years easy.”

“ It is,” said Sarah, abstractedly.

“ And that is what Harry always tells me, after he’s been courting a bit, my dear,” said the old woman more cheerfully. “ You know what a steady lad Harry is.”

“ Yes, mother.”

“ And you should see the beautiful chest of drawers he’s been making in his odd hours, Sarah,” said her companion, totally forgetting, in her anxiety to plead her son’s cause, that same chest of drawers was to be kept a profound secret from Sarah, until the happy day she was led a bride across her husband’s doorstep, if that should ever happen, “ all inlaid, I think he calls it, with bits of ivory and some kind of wood they bring from furrin parts, and a couple of tea trays all green, and blue, and red, with peacocks and temples, and I can’t say what besides, painted on them.”

“ Mother ! mother ! didn’t you promise that you’d never say a word about ‘em,” said a pleasant voice at her elbow, and with a faint scream old Mrs. Jobson threw her apron over her head, and began to rock herself backwards and forwards, as if she was in great pain.

“ Don’t think anything of what my mother, silly old body that she is, has been telling you,

dear Sarah," said the young man, whose silent entry had caused his mother so much shame. "The trifle she was making such a long story about was meant as a pleasant surprise some day if—if—dear Sarah—" and here he came to a dead stop.

"Won't you sit down a bit, Harry," said Sarah, dusting a chair with an awkward carelessness, "it's very warm walking, and it's a long way from your house."

He did not take the seat, but stood leaning against the dresser, watching her flitting to and fro about the fast darkening kitchen with an honest kind of admiration which would have amused an unconcerned spectator. Harry was a good, honest fellow ; he was broad in the chest, limbs strongly knit, a curly head of hair, sparkling eyes, light features, rather frank than handsome, for they were too much sunburnt to deserve the latter epithet, with flesh and muscle enough about him to make half a dozen Manchester weavers. As he had come for the purpose of courting he had

dressed himself smartly, with a pair of tight-fitting trousers, which showed off his well-made legs, blue coat and gilt buttons, with a black handkerchief round his neck, tied with a true lover's knot.

Old Mrs. Jobson, by this time, had gained courage to look up again, and being a quick-witted woman, she saw in an instant that the two young people would get on much better without her, so pretending that she had staid far too long, and that she had to go to the grocer's for some things she wanted, she scarcely took time to bid Sarah good bye before she was gone.

“Harry,” said Sarah, after a considerable silence, during which she had been summoning up courage to put the question, “have you heard anything of our Fanny since Tuesday?”

Harry had, but did not like to tell what he had heard or what he knew, and he took the very worst method he could have hit upon for Sarah's peace of mind. With all his courage and hardihood he was a complete child before

the delicate, girlish-looking creature who was standing, with all the bashful artlessness of a simple child before him. The glimpse he caught of her white face, as she spoke the words in a questioning tone, and the wild gleam of her eye, fairly unmanned him.

“ I know without your telling me, Harry,” she cried the next moment, in a sorrowful voice, “ Fanny has gone away.”

“ Only for a short time, Sarah, I believe,” said her lover, endeavouring to speak cheerfully, “ she came to me on Tuesday night, and took me aside, for she had another person with her—”

“ A man ?” interrupted Sarah.

“ Yes, and a very good-looking man, dressed quite like a gentleman, and seemingly much above her in station, although Fanny did look quite as grand ; he went a short distance away, though I could see he was watching us like a kite with his keen eyes, and she said—‘ Harry, dear, will you give this locket to our Sarah, with my best love ?’

and with which she pulled off a locket, made of silver, that she had hanging round her neck by a piece of ribbon, and put it into my hand.”

Harry produced the said silver locket, which Sarah had frequently seen on Fanny’s neck, and placed it on the table before her.”

“ And you did not try to stop her, Harry ?” gasped the poor girl, sinking on a seat near her.

“ You may be certain I tried my best, Sarah,” said Harry warmly, “ and told her what a dreadful fate she was rushing headlong into, and that if she left her home no honest man would look at her afterwards ; then she burst out laughing in my face, and said she merely sent you the bit of a silver thing because she thought it was safer than in the lodging she had taken at Bradford whilst Jessie lay ill of the fever. Then the gentleman came up and she shook hands with me and said ‘ Good night,’ and she was gone like a flash of lightning.”

“ Oh ! Harry, and did you believe her ? ”
sobbed Sarah.

“ I did, Sarah, until she was gone, and I found myself standing staring after her, then in a moment the truth flashed upon me, when I remembered the exceedingly wild, unaccountable manner Fanny had with her ; and I ran like mad the road they had gone ; but it was perfectly useless, although I must have run nearly a mile, for I never clapped eyes upon her again.”

Sarah’s sobs were the only sounds heard in the room for several minutes ; she did not like to upbraid Harry for his share of the occurrence, and yet, somehow, it appeared to her that he might have prevented Fanny from going away in that strange man’s company, if he had tried.

“ God help her ! ” she cried at length, wiping away her tears ; “ it was an ill-advised thing to do, and nothing but sorrow will come of it, I’m sure, Harry.”

Harry’s thoughts, probably, ran in the same

direction, although he set himself to the task of endeavouring to comfort poor Sarah, professing it as his belief that Fanny was really lodging at Bradford as she had said, and if that was the case, of course there was no occasion to fret about her, as she would probably be nearly as comfortable as if she was still with them.

“ I’ll soon know if that’s the case,” said Sarah, with the quick decision she sometimes displayed. “ Please God, if Jessie gets better, I’ll go to Bradford next week on purpose to ask Miss Thorne about her.”

Mr. Crisp came in at that moment, and gave Harry a kind but mournful greeting.

“ Are you not afeared to come amongst us just now, my lad ?” asked he, as he took Harry’s hand, “ folks are like rats, when a house is going to tumble down, and run away as fast as their legs will carry them.”

“ I should be ashamed to do that,” said Harry, looking at Sarah.

“ And I’m quite sure, father,” added Sarah,

putting in her word, “our friends have not been shy in coming to us since Jessie took the fever. Rachel Walker sadly wants to sit up with aunt Salmon, and Harry’s mother has just been here to see if she could do anything. Miss Gladstone sent down one of the maids from ‘The Rookery,’ and Dr. Vinen himself called to-day.”

“Whisht, my lass, or thou’lt have run all the parish over in ten minutes,” said her father, more cheerfully. “Is there no one but thy mother with Jessie?”

“Aunt Salmon has been with her till a very short time ago, and she’s gone home to see if any thing had been wanted there during her absence, and will be back again before ten o’clock,” said Sarah.

Harry thought to himself that was a ready way of spreading the infection amongst the large, little family of the Salmons, and that in truth it would be much wiser to have had as little communication as possible carried on between the infected houses and the rest

of the parish. With very natural shortsightedness, however, he forgot that he ran quite as great risk himself in coming to see Sarah, a pleasure which he certainly never, for a single instant, thought of denying himself.

“How’s trade, Harry?” asked Mr. Crisp, after Sarah had gone upstairs to see how Jessie was.

“Only middling, I am sorry to say,” rejoined the young man; “all through the country the Union has had complaints sent to it of diminished employment, and of a rise in the price of bread, which is fast bringing the working man to the poor-house. Things are very threatening just now, Mr. Crisp.

“They are, indeed,” said Crisp, gloomily, “and what’s worse, my lad, he’d be a clever prophet to be able to say how soon they would mend.”

“What are we to do, then?” demanded the younger man, his dark eye flashing; “are we to lie down and starve like dogs on a dung-

hill, or burn machines and factories and hay-ricks and corn-stacks ?”

“ I take it, Harry,” returned Crisp, phlegmatically, “ God doesn’t intend us to do either. We are to wait patiently.”

“ And starve patiently,” interposed Harry.

“ To wait patiently,” continued William, not heeding the interruption, “ and calmly, for what He will bring about in His own good time. If it was the fault of the employers, all this want of work, I might talk differently, but they’re suffering as badly, aye, and even worse than we are, and it would be madness to turn our hands against those from whom we draw our subsistence.”

“ I know that, Mr. Crisp,” said Harry.

“ And as to burning the corn-stacks, Harry, would that make bread cheaper ?”

“ No,” replied Harry, more quietly.

“ And burning the factories and foundries, would that be the means of giving employment to the workmen ?” continued Crisp.

“ No,” cried Harry, “ and it would be a

scandalous shame to endeavour to set the men against the masters.”

“ And yet, Harry, some of your union-men are trying.”

“ I should like to know who they are, that’s all,” cried Harry.

“ Wait a bit, my lad, and your wish may be gratified,” rejoined Crisp, firmly. “ Have your factory hands been put on half time yet?”

“ No, but it was intimated as much last week. I’m afraid ’twill make mischief with some of the hands.”

“ Why should it? The master is not to blame.”

“ Certainly not, but some men are so blinded by their own selfishness that they cannot be induced to believe that it is not the masters’ fault,” said Harry; “ they complain of the machinery they’ve introduced in the works, as if it wasn’t the grandest thing that was ever discovered.”

“ And forget, at the same time,” rejoined

Crisp, “that it is owing to machinery our business, above every other, is mainly indebted for its success. But take my advice, Harry, lad, and keep out of the way of these Unionists.”

“Mother wants you, father,” said Sarah, as she came down stairs; and her father hurried away.

“Well, Sarah, the old woman will be getting anxious for me,” said Harry, rising. “I did intend asking you to go to Chilworth Feast with us, little dreaming that poor Jessie would have been taken so ill in the meantime, but if she recovers you may join us yet.”

“Ah! Harry, we must not talk and plan about our little pleasures when the hand of God seems about to smite us so heavily,” said Sarah, in a saddened tone; “but if you go to Chilworth you will see Tommy and Bobby, poor little things, and be sure you bring me good news back how they’re getting on; yes, and be sure you give them my love.”

“That I will, Sarah, with all my heart too,

but you mustn't look so downcast, dear girl, for there's plenty of time before then for poor little Jessie to get better."

Sarah shook her head, and gave a deep sigh, as she said—

"I should have no heart to go this year, Harry."

"Don't talk so, my dear," said Harry, in a more cheerful voice, "Jessie will get better, and then Fanny will come again."

"Harry, are you not forgetting all about your mother?" said Crisp, coming in upon them at the moment, as they stood at the door. "The clock has struck ten, my lad."

"I am going directly," said the young man, pushing his hat down over his eyes. "Good night, Mr. Crisp,—good night, Sarah," and he was gone.

CHAPTER X.

IT was Sunday, and William Gladstone really required the rest that the Sabbath brought him, for in addition to his usual duties, which were always onerous enough, the outbreak of fever had brought him a great accession of labour, and that, too, of a very painful as well as perplexing nature. It is rarely an agreeable thing to visit the homes of the labouring classes, notwithstanding all the fine sentiment that has been wasted upon the duty.

Mr. Gladstone and his coadjutors met with rebuffs enough to have induced them to throw up the task in disgust, had they not had a

higher purpose in view than the mere gratification of their own pleasure.

They found little actual want, although they met with plenty of poverty and privation, endured with that heroic resolution to hide it from the public eye which so many of our countrymen daily practise, without the world troubling itself in the slightest degree about the matter ; but on all hands their first efforts were repulsed by that dogged dislike to permit a stranger to interfere with their domestic concerns, which really seems—from its universal diffusion—to be an inherent quality in the highest character amongst the working classes.

Dr. Vinen, in his sermon that day, took the opportunity to revert to the subject that filled the minds of all but the very young children of the parish. He reminded them that life and death were in the hands of Almighty God, and that He could smite whom He chose ; that He made no distinction of persons—the rich and the poor, the

young and the old, were equal in His mercies and His chastisements, and that there was for all an appointed time to die, and none could say how soon, or how long his hour would be in coming. Amongst them those whom Providence had blessed with wealth ought to share it, more especially at such a time, with those who require it, whilst his poorer neighbours should by cleanliness in their households strive to avert the pestilence that was hanging over them.

During the following week, he said, a still more thorough inspection of the parish would be undertaken, and then with a beautiful intercession to Almighty God, he dismissed his hearers to their homes.

A peculiar feeling of solemnity lay on the hearts of William Gladstone and his two sisters as they walked home through the fields, on their way from church, after listening to Dr. Vinen's impressive sermon. Never before had the solemn presence of death been brought home so fully to the actual sense

of each, not even when their parents lay on their death-beds. Then the ripe corn was being gathered into the garner of the reaper, and though there was much sorrow and many tears, they felt that death in their case was but the coming glory of a long and well-spent life—but a transmission from an earthly to a heavenly existence.

It was very different on the present occasion, when every rank and condition of life—young and old alike—were threatened with attack from a hidden foe; nay, where youth was peculiarly marked out for sacrifice, as if the gift of that blessed spring time was in the present instance to be turned into a curse.

The time and the season seemed peculiarly in unison with their feelings. It was one of those still, gloomy days, which come to us occasionally in the very prime of summer, when a dense mass of cloud shuts out the sun without bringing rain with it, and when the noisiest warbler of the fields, the merry sky-

lark, seemingly subdued by the stillness of nature, is mute.

The two girls untied their bonnet-strings, and Kate began to fan herself with her hand-kerchief long before they reached the brow of the hill where a turf seat usually tempted them to sit for a few minutes to rest themselves, and to enjoy the extensive and varied view it afforded of the surrounding country. Kate and William sat down for a few moments, whilst Frances remained standing under the shadow of an elm tree that grew near the seat, almost unconsciously scanning the rich landscape under the unfamiliar aspect it now presented to her eye.

Stretching away from the base of the hill was presented a long track of level country, dotted here and there with coppices through which a river wound like a silvery line, the mills with their weirs adding another charm to the beauty of the picture; waving corn fields in all their prodigal wealth of green, and far stretching pastures, where the cattle were

quietly grazing, filled in the foreground, whilst the distant prospect was bounded by one of those abrupt hills, half crag, half forest, which abound in this part of Yorkshire.

A deep sigh from Kate drew attention from her two companions.

“What is the matter?” asked her brother, quietly, without looking up.

Kate shuddered and turned crimson as she said—

“I am very much afraid, brother—”

“Afraid of what?” he asked, in a sharper tone.

“Of the fever,” said Kate, in a low voice. “Do not chide me,” she added in the childish, yet loving tone she sometimes assumed, and which always disarmed her brother, in spite of himself. “You know that I am a moral coward, and that I tremble and grow pale when Frances, there, would prove herself quite a heroine.”

“Well, Kate,” said William, drily, as if he expected she would continue.

Kate, however, was silent ; the twitchings of her face seemed to betray the uneasiness of her mind, if one might interpret the alternations of distress and terror that passed in such rapid succession over that beautiful and youthful mirror.

“Have you nothing more to say, Kate?” asked her brother, after a long pause, during which Kate had well nigh worked a hole in her silk glove with twisting it round her finger. “I really am at a loss to understand your wishes.”

“Kate means to say,” interposed Frances, gently, “that if it could be managed she would like to leave Braidsworth during the continuance of the fever. Am I not right in my surmise, Kate?”

“I am afraid so,” whispered Kate, without raising her eyes ; “if William would consent.”

William looked anything but pleased, as he said—

“ Certainly, Kate, if you wish it;” and, rising, he took out his watch, and continued, “ We ought to have been home ere this.”

Kate re-tied her bonnet strings, and followed Frances and her brother in silence, scarcely knowing whether to condemn herself or not for what had passed. One moment she felt it was her duty to remain with the rest of her family at all hazards; the next, terror took possession of her mind, and she thought it was perfectly reasonable to avoid the danger by going on a visit to a distance, until the fever had abated.

“ Do you also wish to run away, Frances?” asked her brother, after walking some considerable distance.

“ Not if I can be of use at home, William. Perhaps it would be as well if Sophy and Kate were to go to the sea-side for a short time and leave us to ourselves.”

“ Not a bad idea,” said her brother, quickly. “ We will name it to Sophia when we get

home—Kate ” (looking back), “ would you like to go to Redcar or Whitby for a few weeks with Sophia ? ”

“ Anywhere, William, ” rejoined Kate more hopefully, “ wherever you think would best suit Sophia. ”

“ I think you would be as well at Redcar as anywhere, just now, ” he remarked, walking on, without noticing her. “ We will name it to Sophia after dinner, and hear what she says, ” and he changed the subject.

“ Look, William, I declare there is Uncle Newman in the garden, ” said Frances, as they came in sight of ‘ The Rookery. ’ “ Did you expect him ? ”

“ Not in the least ; his humour, however, is so uncertain that I am not at all surprised to see him here, even though it be Sunday, ” replied her brother. “ Come, he has seen us, so we may as well encounter him at once, girls ; ” and William quickened his pace, as the figure of a stout, gaunt old man was seen moving down the garden to meet them.

“I am glad to see you, sir,” said the nephew, kindly, on coming within earshot, “especially as I missed you at Bradford on Wednesday.”

Uncle Newman’s stern features slightly relaxed from their frozen grimness, although he did not vouchsafe even one of his wintry smiles in return for this kindly greeting. He was a large, heavy man, apparently between seventy and eighty years of age, with a considerable degree of caustic shrewdness and irony in his composition, judging by the peculiar expression of the large black eyes and the heavy lines round his mouth. He was somewhat deaf, and a trifle bent, which made him look still older than he really was; there was a slight sprinkling of grey hairs about his temples, but though they did not make his face look more venerable, they certainly gave him a most severe cast of countenance.

“You’ve been to church, I presume, nephew?” he said, in a harsh, grating voice, after he had patted Kate and Frances on the

cheek, with a clumsy kind of tenderness they had been accustomed to all their lives.

“ We have, sir,” rejoined the nephew ; “ in fact, we rarely miss going.”

“ Do you think it makes you better ?” asked the old man, with a kind of sneer, which often provoked the nephew. “ I always notice that you religious folks turn out the biggest rascals in the long run.”

“ That is a severe judgment,” answered William, quietly. “ I hope and trust, sir, going to church does do us good. This morning, for instance, Doctor Vinen alluded to the fever, which, I am sorry to say, has broken out in the village, and touched upon it in such a beautiful manner, laying down the duty of each person so clearly and so admirably, that I for one felt both comforted and encouraged by his sermon.”

Frances fancied she saw the large under-jaw tremble for a moment, when her brother ceased speaking ; but if the old man was touched at all by what he had heard, he did

not permit himself to betray it by words, for he merely said—

“ It is the fever, sir, that has brought me out of my house to-day ; but we will discuss that matter after dinner. How soon do you dine ?”

“ Immediately, sir ; if you will come into the house, the girls will take off their bonnets, and we will have the dinner brought up at once.”

“ Let them go in, and send us word when dinner is quite ready,” said Uncle Newman, turning down a side walk. “ Nephew, your garden is sadly neglected.”

“ We have all been much engaged lately, sir,” pleaded William, following him, “ and these warm rains positively make the weeds grow so fast that it is quite impossible to keep up the place quite so neat as one could wish. I should like Godfrey to see those roses before they go out of bloom, if you could spare him, as I think there must be a canker at the roots of some of them.”

“ He will be going to Bradford some day this week, and can call on his way,” said the old gentleman, in a more pleasant tone of voice. “ How is business, William ?”

“ Nothing to boast of, sir,” said the nephew, who was prepared for a regular catechising, “ no one dares take a foreign order, unless there is a deposit made beforehand, and that makes orders so few, that a great many masters are scarcely able to employ their workpeople.”

“ A pretty state of things, truly,” said the old man, with much bitterness. “ In my time, nephew, we were quite independent of these beggarly foreigners altogether, and things went pleasantly on without them.”

William could have told him there had been a great revolution in many things since his time, that the long, protracted war had fostered in an extraordinary degree the cutlery trade, and now that the war had ceased, one of their best sources of industry had been closed,

whilst no fresh channel had as yet been opened in its place.

“ Those war times were truly a godsend to many more than myself,” said Uncle Newman, who was always in the seventh heaven when this theme was introduced. “ Every time Lord Wellington drubbed Boney I went to bed a richer man by some hundreds of pounds, nephew, than when I arose in the morning. I would have paid the ringers myself, rather than that a merry peal should not have been rung by the joy-bells. The times are sadly altered since then !” he added, with a sigh.

William thanked God inwardly that the war times had gone by, and prayed they might never return ; but that the two wise and great nations should entertain a lasting friendship for each other, for the good of all other nations, and cultivate the blessings of peace, so that their rival swords might be turned into ploughshares, even though those swords had been made in Sheffield or Braidsworth.

“ I’m afraid, sir,” said William, after a pause, “ there are few amongst us who can make such a boast now. It is much more probable we are all losing thousands instead of making them.”

“ Likely enough—likely enough,” replied Uncle Newman. “ Nothing is so good now as it was in my young days. Trade appears to me to have gone to the dogs since then ; there’s nothing but beggarly scrapings for those silly fools who embark in it !”

“ But, uncle, what are people of capital and energy to embark in ? Every one is not an Uncle Newman, with a handsome mansion and plenty of money in the funds to back his energy ?”

“ Those women have certainly forgotten us altogether,” said Uncle Newman, after a pause. “ Suppose we go and see if there is any chance of dinner,” and he led the way, with huge strides, towards the house.

They found dinner on the table, and Sophia sitting on a couch near the window. The old

man went up to her, and took her thin wasted hands in his rough palms, kissing her brow and smoothing the braided hair that was parted over her forehead with a tenderness of which no one would have supposed him capable a moment before. For an instant he was a totally different being ; his voice was both gentle and soothing, a pleasant gleam shot from beneath his shaggy eyebrows, and an agreeable smile played about his mouth, that quite altered the expression of the lower part of his face.

“ My dear love ! I’ve been longing to hear from you,” he said, seeing no one but herself. “ You were very poorly when I was here last, if you remember ; and, indeed, when I returned home I made Polly boil down calves’ feet jelly enough to last you a month, but my lout of a man forgot to bring it here.”

“ Thank you all the same, uncle,” said Miss Gladstone, with a smile, “ I am sure the jelly would have done me much good.”

“ Then you shall have some this very

week," said the old man, eagerly, " but I want you to come to Longford, Sophy, my love, and I'll take no refusal, so you must just make a virtue of necessity at starting; but we'll talk the matter over after dinner by our two selves. Sit still, my dear, and I'll wheel you up to the table;" and, suiting the action to the word, he placed his niece's couch in the niche it occupied at the dinner table, and then took a seat next to her.

All through the dinner he paid Sophy the same solicitous attention, anticipating her every want with a delicacy few would have given him, from his uncouth, bearish manner, credit for possessing, By the time the wine and fruit were placed on the table, even his two younger nieces came in for a share of his attention, whilst his nephew was favoured with two or three long harangues upon the briskness of trade when he was engaged in commercial pursuits; but whenever he turned to Sophia the eye moistened, and the voice instantly faltered. If ever uncle Newman

had the vanity to wish to transmit his strongly marked unloveable features to posterity, it should have been done at that very moment; he really looked almost venerable under the softening influence.

None of the others felt jealous of this preference. Miss Gladstone's misfortune would have been quite sufficient to account for the partiality, even had her character been less amiable than it was. Even Kate, however, whose versatile character made her more liable to transient impressions than either Frances or William, felt that Uncle Newman only paid Sophy the same loving homage that the rest of the family, in their several fashions, were in the habit of doing, whilst Frances felt peculiarly grateful to the generally harsh old man for the exception he made in Sophia's favour to his usual harshness.

“ We were discussing a scheme as we returned from church, sir,” said William, taking advantage of a general silence, “ which the fever renders in some degree necessary.”

“ What is that, pray ?” asked Uncle Newman, in a gruff voice.

“ We are all rather afraid of infection, sir,” continued his nephew, “ and as far as my sisters are concerned, I think there is no necessity for Sophia and Kate, at any rate, running the risk of catching it.”

“ Oh, indeed !” exclaimed Uncle Newman, as a glimmering suspicion of his plan with regard to Sophia being in some sort disturbed, crossed his mind ; “ and what, may I ask, do you propose, in your wisdom, to do ?”

“ I did think of taking lodgings at Redcar for Sophy and Kate, and keep Frances with me.”

“ Then my niece, Frances, I suppose, has got a charm of some kind against the relentless foe,” said the old man, sneeringly.

“ No, indeed, uncle,” said Frances, speaking for the first time ; “ but William will have a very harassing time of it, if the fever increases ; and I think it my duty to stay and make him as comfortable as I can.”

Uncle Newman looked at her from beneath his shaggy brows with more attention than he usually paid to any womankind, except his favourite Sophia. The beautiful blush that her speech had called up into Frances's usually pale face, made her look the very image of her mother at the same age, and the memory of his sister, in her happy girlhood, made his strong, loud voice falter somewhat as he said—

“ You’re a silly goose, lass, to stay behind when Kate, there, has made up her mind to run away.”

“ One of us is quite sufficient to see that our brother is made comfortable,” said Frances, in her calm manner.

“ I don’t see why it should devolve upon you, my dear,” retorted the old man, who still kept his gaze upon her, for he began to discover a new and hitherto unsuspected pleasure in his youngest niece’s presence, which his partiality for his eldest had previously prevented his discovering.

“ I am more accustomed to William’s ways than Kate, sir,” responded Frances, in a deprecating tone.

“ It’s no business of mine, my lass,” he answered, drily. “ I suppose then I have to take charge of that pretty simpleton,” he added, looking at Kate in no very pleasant manner. “ I’m afraid, niece, you cannot put up very cannily with an old bachelor’s domestic arrangements.”

“ I will try, sir,” said Kate, with a smile ; “ that is if you make yourself as agreeable as possible.”

The gleam of passion that shot from beneath those awful brows at this thoughtless sally made her repent the moment it was uttered. Uncle Newman did not retort, however, as was his wont, but pushing back his chair with a bitter smile, that would have struck terror to a stouter heart than Kate’s, he began to stride backwards and forwards in the narrow lane formed by the table and wall.

William could scarcely restrain a smile at

the change a few careless words had made amongst them. Sophia looked hurt, and Frances grave, whilst tears seemed swimming over the silky lashes that shaded Kate's usually merry eyes. William rather loved mischief at times, and the head and front of Kate's offending was so innocent, that he did not take his usual pains to allay the storm on the present occasion, but kept sipping his wine, and looking askance at Frances, whenever the old man's back was turned.

Uncle Newman at length got tired of his treadmill performance, and came back to the table.

“Is the fever very bad, nephew?” he enquired in a lower tone.

“Not very, sir, at present, but it promises to be so ere long,” rejoined his nephew, rather surprised at the change.

“I remember it when I was a boy,” continued the old man, talking more to himself than to those around him, as he sat with half-closed eyes, and spoke in a sorrowful tone,

that made them all turn pale in spite of themselves. “Your mother and I were the only two spared out of a household of thirteen, and for two nights and days I lay delirious, with a brother’s dead body on the bed beside me. It killed the doctor and nurses, my dears, and my poor widowed mother amongst the rest. It was truly fearful.”

It must have been fearful, indeed, to have engraved itself so deeply on that strong, brave heart. Kate drew in her breath, and darted one imploring look at the old man, but he was too much absorbed in his own recollections to notice it just then.

“I remember when we got strong enough to crawl out again,” he continued, in the same sorrowful voice, “how strange it seemed to go into the neighbouring houses and find many a chair empty that we had last seen filled by the lads and lasses we had played with all our lives. There was a fair young girl next door to our house, that your mother and I had many a merry ramble with, that

had the grass growing green over her grave by then—and—and—” a groan stopped his utterance, and flinging his bandana handkerchief over his face, the old man leaned back in his chair and became silent.

He had never before laid bare the sorrows of his past life so fully to their gaze. Sophia and Frances felt that “that fair young girl” had been the day-dream of his boyhood, and with uncle Newman’s strong, uncultivated affections, it was evident that her memory had haunted his life, even to old age.

“ Let Sophia go home with me,” said he, after a pause, as he raised his head and looked at his nephew. “ You can drive Kate over any morning, when she is ready to come.”

“ But, uncle, I am afraid I shall put you to inconvenience,” said Kate, with some show of spirit.

“ That is my concern, niece, not yours,” he rejoined, in his ungracious way ; “ besides, you will be company for your sister.”

This was a humbling idea to Kate, but she

bore it with more philosophy than her brother gave her credit for ; nay, she even smiled, and thanked him, and that, too, in such a gentle voice, that Uncle Newman himself felt surprised, and he would, in all probability, have noticed it in words, had not Frances reminded her sister, by a glance, that it was time to leave the gentlemen to enjoy their wine together.

With so many loving hands, it was an easy task for Sophia to reach the drawing-room, where so many hours of her captivity had been passed, sitting by an open window, through which a thousand balmy odours were wafted into the room ; Kate and Frances read to her by turns, but the book often dropped into their laps as the subject was changed for one more congenial to the minds of all ; a lively discussion ensued about uncle Newman, who was the only living relative they possessed.

His career, like that of most men in his station, is soon told. He owed his success in

life to the energy and shrewdness of his character, much more than to any advantages of birth or education. An early disappointment had somewhat soured a temper not very good at the best ; but the old man concealed beneath that rough and repelling exterior, a warm and kindly disposition, as was evidenced by his partiality for his eldest niece. He had retired from business many years before, and built himself a handsome house at Longford, amidst the beautiful scenery he had loved to wander amongst in his youthful days, and here, at long intervals, his nephew and nieces were in the habit of going to spend an uncomfortable week, for all uncle Newman's efforts could not prevent his acting the bashaw, even in his own house. It was no wonder, therefore, that Kate dreaded such a visit, or that she permitted herself to indulge in a little petulance when the churlish invitation was given.

The gentlemen came up to tea long before Kate had settled, in her own mind, the reason

why bachelor uncles had ever been invented, if they had all to be as cross and bearish as her own.

Now the time was drawing near for his departure, uncle Newman was getting very fidgety and impatient, and he could scarcely refrain from reminding Sophia that it was time they should set out.

Frances relieved his impatience, after a time, by bringing her sister's cloak and bonnet, and then some little employment was afforded him in ordering his chaise to be brought out. When he got his nephew to the stable, for this purpose, he fumbled about in his capacious pockets for some time, and at length fished out a greasy, black pocket-book, of enormous dimensions, from which he extracted a bank-note.

“ You will find this useful to distribute amongst your poor people, nephew,” he said, thrusting the note into the young man’s hand.

“ But, uncle, you don’t belong to our parish,” said the nephew, who had rarely

known him give anything away before in charity.

“ No matter, lad ; it’s for the sake of them that’s dead and gone,” said he sadly, as he put up his pocket-book again. “ John, I hope you’ve seen all the girths tight this time, as Miss Gladstone goes with me.”

The man vouched for Miss Gladstone’s safety, as far as he was concerned, and then uncle Newman fidgetted his way upstairs again. Frances was observed assisting Sophia down, and in a few minutes she was comfortably seated beside him in the chaise.

“ You can bring Kate out as soon as Sophia’s luggage is ready, nephew,” said he, as he drew up the glass. “ Drive on, John,” and, with a nod of his head, the chaise drove off.

The chaise was stopped before it got far from the house, and uncle Newman’s tall figure was seen protruding through the window, and his harsh voice was heard crying out, “ Niece Frances ! a word with you.”

Frances ran towards the chaise, wondering what could be the matter, and her surprise was much increased by the old man taking her hand in both his horny fists.

“ You’re a good lass, I’m sure, my bairn, or you wouldn’t wish to stay with your brother just now,” said he, more in the tone of voice he generally used in addressing Sophia than that he usually employed with herself; “ but take care of yourself, and don’t be rushing into the way of the fever;” and, with another dreadful squeeze, that made her whole arm tingle with pain, he dragged himself into the chaise again, and ordered his servant to drive forward as fast as he could.

CHAPTER XI.

FRANCES was now evidently so far on the high-road to her uncle's favour, that had she been of a speculative disposition, she would probably have indulged in building castles in the air with uncle Newman's imaginary wealth; but, being of a prosaic, every-day character, she did nothing of the sort; there were far too many serious things for her to think about than indulging in dreams.

The business of life, however darkly chequered it may be, is rarely so melancholy but that some ray of sunshine springs up to illumine the darkness. Their long-promised visit to "Sunnyside" gave William and Frances

a pleasant anticipation to dwell upon, even amidst the stern, if not painful, duties that demanded all their daily exertions.

William had made a tour of the parish on the Monday—accompanied by Mr. Smith—the result of which Frances and Kate judged from the clouded brow and fit of abstraction he indulged in at dinner-time. He was not naturally of a communicative disposition, especially when disagreeable news was all he had to relate, and nothing passed during the meal to enlighten them as to the reason of his gloom. Sophia had early taught them how wrong it was to trouble him with questions, when he was in no mood to answer them, and they did not, therefore, strive to discover what had occurred, but contented themselves with discussing the ordinary topics of conversation, although those topics were almost entirely confined to themselves.

Once only Frances ventured within the charmed circle to ask how William Crisp's little girl was, and the brief and gloomy

answer she received did not tempt her to pursue the enquiry.

“Jessie was very ill,” he said, “and there were more in the cottages about the village in an equally dangerous state, for the lapse of a single night had enabled the fell destroyer to make a terrible onslaught on the defenceless victims.”

“Had we not better defer our visit to the Coulsons?” she asked the next minute.

“Certainly not; the Vinens intend going, and why should not we?”

“You know best, brother; I only thought something might occur during our absence.”

“We might never stir from home if we permitted such fears to influence us,” he answered. “No, we will go and strive to enjoy a pleasant day, even if it be the last we may anticipate for a long time to come.”

He got up and went out of the room as he said this, and they saw him hurrying down the garden the next minute in the direction of the village.

“How anxiety about this dreadful fever alters William,” said Kate, watching her brother, as he leaped the hedge, in preference to going round by the gate. “Frances, are you not afraid?”

“Not much,” said Frances, taking up some knitting. “At least, I am not so much disturbed by the dread of the fever as I should be if it were at a distance, and permitted myself to anticipate all manner of evil happening to William in my absence.”

“Suppose you were to catch it?” persisted Kate.

“I never permit myself to imagine that; I believe I am quite as safe here as I should be at ‘Sunnyside’ or Longford.”

“And yet there is no fever at either of those places?”

“Reflect for a minute,” said Frances, pursuing her own thoughts, rather than answering those of her sister, “how very terrible it would be if all the healthy inhabitants of a village, or even of one house only, were to run

away when one or two of their relatives or friends were stricken down by an infectious malady ; how full of terrors would be the beds of the dying, unsoothed by one loving hand, or unheeded by one tender accent of pitying fondness ; when the darkness of night settled down on hearts that would soon cease to beat with that precious life which, but for the wicked and selfish cowardice of others, might have been prolonged for many happy years ; and for the survivors—”

“ Frances,” interrupted Kate, with firmness, “ I will stay with you, and brave it all ; it is my duty, and I will not swerve from it, come what may.”

“ But uncle Newman expects you at Longford.”

“ I will write and tell him I have altered my mind ; he likes me too little to be unhappy at my resolution.”

“ You had better not do so until William hears your determination,” said Frances, with a smile.

“ I’ll write this moment,” said Kate, opening her desk, “ or he may refuse my doing so.”

The note was soon written, and then Kate felt happy ; she went to the piano, and sung a pathetic ballad, with a richness of voice that made Frances listen in spite of herself ; she looked so pretty, that it was impossible to gaze without admiring her, and for one moment an exquisite pang shot through Frances’s heart as she watched the fair face crimson over with pleasure, as Kate’s voice rose with thrilling power, whilst singing the triumph of some village maid over a high-born rival.

She conquered the feeling almost before it had birth, and then went far back in the shadow of the recess, listening to her sister’s voice, until she felt her cheeks wet with tears. Kate, almost at the same moment, arose and left the instrument, humming the tune with which she had finished, and without noticing her sister’s emotion, left the room.

Frances had by nature a cheerful, hopeful

temperament, which generally prompted her to look at everything on its brightest side, and it was very fortunate she had, as many things at present conspired to render such a gift an actual necessity of her existence.

She had early been taught by an excellent and loving mother to cultivate this serenity of temper, and she now reaped the good effects of such a course of moral training in its fullest perfection. If all parents would teach their children to cultivate a happy spirit, through all the trifling ills of life, it would be a ten times more inestimable heritage than the wealth they strive so ceaselessly to amass for those they have to leave behind.

There was, in the first place, this dreaded scourge, which was desolating the parish with its ravages. As she sat and thought of it, in the chair she had not stirred from since Kate had left the room, she heard the church bell knelling the departure of another human being from the scene of his labours. Then there was the badness of trade, and conse-

quently the dearth of employment, and with it the risk of her brother's capital, the hard-earned fruit of years of toil and thought. Very painful it was to observe how thin and grave he had grown in the last few months, and how rarely he seemed to snatch a few hours' amusement amidst all the serious employments of his daily life ; how rarely a smile came over that face which used to be so blithe and cheerful, and how seldom his voice rang with the merry laugh that once had characterised it.

There are few spectacles more painful to witness than that of a young face darkened over with the clouds of care ; youth in general has such a treasury of hope on which to fall back that life must be a stern reality indeed to be able to deaden the glorious gift. Frances sighed as she thought how the storm-clouds of adversity seemed to be blotting out the rainbow tints from her brother's path ; and then, with a self-reproving exclamation at the folly of indulging such morbid fancies, she

took up her knitting again and began to knit as rapidly as her fingers could move, to drive away the painful thoughts that crowded upon her brain.

When William came home in the evening he was more cheerful than she had seen him for some time.

“ I wish Wilding would come,” said he in quick, sharp tones, as he threw himself upon the sofa with an evident desire to talk.

“ Why, William ?” asked Kate.

“ Because I am more than usually happy, I suppose, and therefore wish to make as many more catch the infection as possible. You understand so little about business, Kate, that it will scarcely enlighten your ignorance if I tell you I have just received a large foreign order, which I am happy to say will keep my men employed for months.”

“ Frances, however, can,” said Kate, as her sister’s face brightened up with the announcement. “ Will it make you very busy, brother ?”

“ Very busy,” said he, gaily. “ I shall be able to employ every hand in Braidsworth until Christmas, silly girl, if they will work at the wages I can offer them. When trade is slack employers are glad to take work at any price, and cannot afford to pay the high wages they do when times are prosperous.”

“ And do you think the men will work for you on the terms you can propose to them?” asked Frances, thoughtfully.

“ My own men will,” said her brother ; “ I have already spoken to two or three whom I can trust, and this night they will all know on what terms I can employ them. Many, however, who are now starving in idleness, will, I know, refuse.”

“ What madness!” exclaimed Frances.

“ It is madness, and yet it will be so ; human nature is at times so warped and perverted that many will prefer burdening the rates and living in semi-starvation to working at prices which will, at all events, find their

wives and children with the necessaries, though with few, perhaps, of the luxuries of life.

“ What a pity it is there is no law to compel men to work in such a case,” continued Frances. “ In America, I believe, they have something of the kind.”

“ Yet American institutions are thought by the Americans much more liberal than our own,” said William, rising and pacing the room with an elastic step. “ In England such a coercion would not be permitted for a moment. I wish Sophia was here, girls. Kate must tell her so much of my news as she understands herself when she gets to Longford.”

It was now Kate’s turn to tell her news, which she did with a quietness that surprised her brother. He did not look pleased, which was really very hard for Kate to bear, for she rather felt as if she deserved some applause for her resolution.

“ I think you will be better at Longford,” he said at length.

“ I would rather stay here, brother. This order will probably take you much from home, and Frances will be very dull by herself.”

William’s countenance showed how greatly he was surprised, for Kate rarely thought so much of other people as to care whether they were merry or dull, so long as she was herself amused.

“ I have written to uncle Newman,” said Kate, talking very fast, as if she was afraid he would refuse his consent to her wishes. “ I told him I could not come at present, so you see nothing more can be done, even if you wished to alter my arrangements.”

“ Nay, Kate, I always wish you to follow your own inclinations,” said her brother, too happy with his altered prospects to oppose her arrangements. “ So ring the bell, and let us have supper, for I feel as if I could sleep peacefully to-night.”

“ You won’t walk up and down your room for hours to-night, William,” said Frances, after the supper tray was removed.

“ Keeping others awake as well as myself, I’m afraid, Frances,” he said affectionately. “ No, my dear, I shall sleep too soundly for that.”

“ Thank God that you can. I’m sure you have often kept me awake till morning.”

“ I will not do so in future, even if I am unable to sleep. It is bad enough to have the sleep driven away from one’s own eyelids, without chasing it from those of others. Did Sophia ever hear me ?”

“ Never.”

“ Nor I, William,” said Kate. “ I’m a perfect dormouse.”

“ I would give worlds, if I possessed such a quality, Kate ; it is very terrible to count the lagging night hours when one is unhappy.”

“ I am very thankful we have now only one evil to struggle against,” said Frances, after a pause. “ The idea of the foundry being closed, and fever in the village as well, has quite haunted me of late ; the two together were very terrible to think of.”

“ How very late it is,” said Kate with a yawn ; “ I declare, the clock is striking eleven. Come, Frances, let us go to bed.”

Their brother lighted their candle, and bade them good night, with the observation that he would soon follow their example. An hour after, however, he was busy with half a dozen plans, and his drawing board before him, preparing drawings for this wonderful contract, which was to relieve him from impending ruin.

He was still hard at work, when his quick ear caught the tread of several feet on the gravel path without, and presently there was heard a sharp pull at the door bell.

“ Who the deuce can that be ?” muttered he to himself, as the sound echoed through the silent house. “ Crisp would never think of coming up at this time of night.”

He heard the dog barking in the yard as he crossed the passage on his way to the front door, for every one was in bed but himself ; but before he could unlock it and

draw back the bolts there came another sharp ring, and, afraid of alarming his sisters, he opened the door, revealing at the moment he did so upwards of a dozen men crowding one upon the other in the porch.

“Well, gentlemen, what is it you want?” demanded Mr. Gladstone, as cheerfully and composedly as if he had fully expected to see them. “This is a very late hour for you to come to see me, is it not?”

“It is, Mr. Gladstone,” said a man who stood in front of the rest. “You will probably know the matter that brings us here.”

“Not at all, my good man. I do not even know yourself.”

“Probably not, sir,” rejoined the other, in a voice that had nothing of Yorkshire in its tones. “We are engineers, sir.”

“I am glad to hear it, for I am one of yourselves,” said William, audaciously. “Tell me what brings you all to my house at this time of night, for I need scarcely tell you I was just going to bed when you rang the bell.”

“ We wants to hav’ a talk wi’ ye, Muster Gladstine,” said a deep voice in the rear, “ about two or three things that be o’ moment to us workin’ men.”

“ Dang thee, hould thy tongue, thou fule,” growled a still deeper voice, stifling the eloquence of the village Demosthenes ; “ let Misther Smooth speak, my lad.”

“ We are a deputation, Mr. Gladstone, from the Trades’ Union,” said their more polished mouthpiece, in the person of Mr. Smooth. “ We have been informed you have taken a very active part in inducing your brother manufacturers to resist our just demands.”

“ I deny that they are just,” rejoined William, firmly. “ I deny that you have the shadow of a right to dictate terms to any man breathing.”

“ I am sorry to hear you say so, sir,” said the other, sneeringly. “ Are you aware that the avowal of such sentiments places your property in great danger.”

Those that were near enough saw by the bright moonlight that the young man's face bore a defiant smile as he listened to this threat.

“I do not understand you, sir.”

“Then, dang ye, we'll make ye,” growled the deep voice that had already spoken in the rear of the party.

“I am much obliged to you for the hint, gentlemen,” said William, sternly. “Is there any other remark you wish to make, for time passes?”

“A great many, Mr. Gladstone,” said Smooth, quieting, by the force of his eloquence, the two growlers, who were whispering to each other that the young manufacturer should be hustled and ducked. “You are only a young man, but you have already earned for yourself the unenviable character of being a thorough tyrant.”

“I have decided upon the course I mean to pursue, and intend to keep it,” said William,

who stood his ground manfully, in spite of their threats. “Not one of my own men has, as yet, joined your illegal Union.”

“Shoot the fellar! duck he! tear he limb fra limb, the cowardly villin!” cried half a dozen of the Union men, foaming with passion.

“Are your followers a pack of wild beasts?” Mr. Gladstone demanded of their mouthpiece. “Order that scoundrel to give you the pistol he holds, so threateningly or I will leave you without another word.”

“They are honest men, Mr. Gladstone, but they are only men after all,” resumed the other, in a surly voice. “Many of them, poor fellows, have not earned a shilling for weeks.”

“I cannot help that. Myself and my brother manufacturers have kept our places open as long as there was a job of work to do, regardless of the fearfully low prices we had to sell at; but now too many of us are nearly bankrupt, and the rest find that the only way to

save themselves from utter ruin is to place their establishments on short time.”

“But you have received a large foreign order, sir,” said Smooth, saucily.

“It is not large enough to give every unemployed artizan in this neighbourhood a single day’s work,” said William. “I intend, of course, to employ my own men upon it whilst it lasts.”

“The Union is determined to let no man work who is not a member and contributes to its funds,” said the other, amidst a deep buzz of applause. “If you do not yield, sir, you will be compelled to close your foundry.”

“I will do neither the one nor the other, gentlemen,” said Mr. Gladstone, who, seeing it was useless talking with them, prepared to shut the door. “Be advised by me; go quietly home, and wait patiently until things work their own cure. Come, my lads, go home quietly,” and he attempted to shut the door.

“Stop he!” roared a dozen human bears,

with a blind, blood-thirsty vindictiveness that would have made a more timid-hearted man shudder, but which only nerved Mr. Gladstone to greater determination.

“Choke him! Strangle him! Drag the white-livered villain through his own pond, and give him a good ducking! Shoot him!” and they rushed upon the door which William had now closed and barred and bolted, with a violence that made the posts start, and the plaster come rattling down about his head.

He stood in the passage that was feebly lit by the candle he had placed on one of the chairs, listening to their wild cries and blasphemous words. They resembled more a pack of hungry wolves than human beings.

Mr. Gladstone was very pale, but you could see it was not caused by fear, for there was almost a smile upon his face, and his eyes flashed as he stood and listened, while three or four roared out for fire to be brought to the porch to burn the house down.

“Silence, fools!” roared the shrill voice of

their leader, above all the din. “ What would be the good of burning the house down ?”

“ Why, to drive the cunning fox out of his den !” said one, in answer to this question.

“ And get hanged for our pains !” William heard Smooth say, in reply. “ Come, let us be moving towards home again.”

“ Wait just a minute, then,” cried a voice that William had heard often enough by this time to recognise. “ There ! hurrah !” and the sharp report of a pistol, followed by the rattle of broken glass in the fanlight over the door, accounted for the cheer.

“ Now, my lads, let’s away home.”

William heard them tramp, one by one, down the gravel walk, until they reached the gate, where they drew up to indulge their feelings with another groan and a few more oaths, before they took their departure.

Mr. Gladstone went back into the parlour and, going to the buffet, poured himself out a glass of wine, which he drank, and then sat down in his chair to ruminate upon the visit.

“ Pleasant, certainly !” he muttered, brushing the mortar off his shoulders, and conscious for the first time that some minute particles had fallen down his neck.

“ I may thank my stars I was not shot. That fellow who led them on has a very pretty idea of what is due to his order, at any rate.”

He drank a second glass of wine, and muttered—

“ I wonder neither Frances nor Kate heard the noise. If I thought they durst remain all night in the house by themselves, I would ride over to York, and get a few soldiers to watch my shops until this absurd rumpus has passed over. The mare has not been out to-day, and is quite fresh, and it is not very far on such a fine night.”

The idea having once taken possession of his mind, he prepared to act upon it without loss of time. If Frances was awake he would explain to her where he was going, and if she

was asleep he would write a note acquainting her with his intention, and place it on the table in the breakfast-room, where she could not fail to see it when she came down.

So he crept up-stairs, and listened at the door of his sisters' room, but everything was so still and quiet he was confident they were both asleep ; and then, coming down again, he wrote his note placed it on the table, and then undid the fastenings of the back-door very gently.

The old mastiff sprang towards him to the full length of her chain, and whined as she recognised her master.

“ Good dog ! good dog ! ” he cried, as she leaped up on his shoulder, as he proceeded to the stable. “ I don’t like to leave the door unlocked, lest those villains should come back again, though I think that scarcely likely. Old girl, you shall finish your nap in the passage,” and he took off her chain and ordered her to lie down on the rug inside the door.

His hand came in contact with the key, and he smiled involuntarily as a mischievous idea entered his mind.

“I’ll lock them all in for a change,” laughed William to himself, as he turned the key of the door from the outside, and, mounting his mare, rode away with it in his pocket. “How Hannah will storm when she finds the window the only means of getting access to the pantry in the morning.”

It was broad daylight, though still early morning, when he rode through York towards the barracks.

In answer to his enquiries for the colonel’s residence, a soldier conducted him thither, but informed him that until morning parade, at eight o’clock, there was little chance of seeing Colonel Stopford.

“My horse and myself are both jaded and hungry enough to make good use of the interval,” said William, glancing toward the barrack-yard with a feeling of disappointment. “Have you many men in garrison just now?”

“Very few, sir. Two companies went away last week to the manufacturing districts, which I am told are in a very disturbed state at present. I did hear it said our commander would not permit any more men to leave garrison until we got a reinforcement.”

This was not very cheering news for Mr. Gladstone to hear, but still he felt confident he could give Colonel Stopford sufficiently cogent reasons why, in his case and that of his neighbours, such a resolution, even if it had been made, should be abandoned.

The men who called themselves Union men were sufficiently lawless to require the strong arm of military law to keep them in check, and the Braidsworth manufacturers had quite as much right to receive military aid as those of Leeds, Manchester, or Sheffield.

William found a quiet public-house, where his mare could be taken care of until he was ready to return home; and having partaken of a hasty breakfast, and made his ablutions, he went to the barracks again.

Morning parade was just over as he arrived. He found Colonel Stopford was not present, but a soldier in undress, who heard him enquiring of a sergeant for his commanding officer, volunteered the information that the Colonel was at that moment at breakfast in his own quarters, and if the gentleman wished to see him he could not have a better opportunity.

The Colonel's residence, judging by the room which William was ushered into, was evidently furnished with the strictest economy, although he understood Colonel Stopford was a man of fortune, and closely allied to more than one noble family. A strong oak table, and half-a-dozen equally substantial chairs, a map of the United Kingdom, with the different garrison towns marked by red squares, and a plan of the recent war operations in the Peninsula, was absolutely the only furniture it contained, excepting a well-worn oil-cloth that covered the floor. By the time William

had noticed this, a step behind him announced the arrival of Colonel Stopford.

It did not require his undress blue coat to proclaim his profession, for his tall, military looking figure and soldier-like bearing made that evident at first sight. His keen eagle eye seemed to search his visitor through as he told his errand, which he did in as few words as possible.

Colonel Stopford's reply was equally laconic. He exceeding regretted he could not assist Mr. Gladstone and his brother manufacturers, for there were scarcely enough men at that moment under his command to carry on the usual operations of the station.

“The case is a very urgent one, Colonel,” persisted Mr. Gladstone. “I had the honour of receiving a deputation of these Unionists last night, and was pretty plainly warned of my fate, should I prove refractory.”

“I admit that the case is urgent, Mr. Gladstone; but as a business man, you will see how impossible it is for me to comply with

your request. The regulations of the service prevent my acquiescing."

"Those regulations, sir, should be amended. A commanding officer in such an emergency should have proper powers granted him to aid those who pay the king's taxes," said William, with bitterness.

Colonel Stopford smiled.

"You would do away all discipline and obedience by such a regulation," he said. "I am sorry, Mr. Gladstone, I cannot assist you; but until I communicate with the authorities at the Horse Guards my hands are tied."

Mr. Gladstone could not urge farther. His heart was filled with anger already at what he felt to be such insulting coldness in a quarter where he expected to meet with ready aid and sympathy. He took up his hat, and bowed, as he said—

"I will depend, sir, on myself."

"If they afford us any aid, sir, from headquarters, I shall be happy to serve you," said the Colonel, with military courtesy.

“I will not inconvenience you, sir,” said the young manufacturer, proudly, as he turned to the door. “If my workshops are fired and my machinery destroyed by a mob of midnight rioters, both of us will know who I have to thank for the deed. I wish you a good morning, Colonel Stopford,” and he turned upon his heel and walked away.

CHAPTER XII.

As William Gladstone rode home, and in no pleasant mood was the journey made, he had ample time both to digest his anger against a government which taxed the people to keep up a large and expensive war establishment to fight its battles in foreign countries, and yet could not afford to check an incipient riot at home, and to determine what course he should pursue now he had only his own courage and vigour to depend upon.

There was, however, one thing quite certain—he had become a marked man with the Unionists, for he was unquestionably the boldest the bravest and most energetic foe to

their cause with whom they had to contend; and there was no doubt if things came to an open rupture he would be made to feel the first effects of the quarrel.

He could not sleep till he had done something, and after considering first one scheme and then another over in his mind, he determined to consult Mr. Philips in this emergency. Mr. Philips' works were the largest in the cutlery trade, and if war were declared between the two rival powers this gentleman would to a certainty suffer as well as himself.

Philips' and Young's steel works were in the neighbourhood of Halifax, but Mr. Philips' mansion was about six miles from the town, and as William had to pass it on his way, he resolved to call there, hoping to find Mr. Philips at home.

Those were not the days when an English manufacturer imitated in his house and grounds the palatial grandeur of Eaton Hall or Chatsworth; and the house, therefore, to which William turned his horse's head, was

as plain and unpretending as the architect could make it. It stood at a moderate distance from the road, and had no other ornament than that which solid walls and spacious windows could give, unless it was the park-like grounds in which it was situated, beautifully laid out, and looking much more extensive than they really were.

Mr. Philips was reported to be very rich ; he was a widower with two daughters. Either the knowledge of his wealth, or the ladies of his family being all of a marriageable age, made Mr. Gladstone something of a stranger ; for he rarely visited there, notwithstanding the owner was a kind, good-hearted man of the world. William Gladstone was not a money hunter, nor did he like the annoyance of being looked upon in the light of an admirer of any woman whom he did not intend to make his wife.

A footman in plain clothes answered the bell, and from this man he learned that Mr. Philips was at home, but had company.

“Perhaps he can come and speak to me for ten minutes,” said Mr. Gladstone, who did not like to have his trouble entirely for nothing. “Tell him it is Mr. Gladstone, of Braidsworth.”

The man took the message, and very soon returned to request William would dismount, and join Mr. Philips and his friends, at the same time ringing a bell, which summoned a groom, to whom he consigned the visitor’s mare.

“They are all gentlemen in your way, Mr. Gladstone,” said the man, who remembered him, notwithstanding the infrequency of his visits. “There is Mr. Young, Mr. Philips’ partner, Mr. Hill, of Halifax, and Mr. Browne—”

“And what has brought them all here at this time of day?” asked Mr. Gladstone.

“Why, I fancy there is mischief abrewing, sir; Mr. Philips is a very timid sort of man, and our people have a mint of money locked up in machinery in the workshops, and those hang-gallows Union men—”

“Ho ! ho ! They’ve been threatening you, too, have they ?” said William, not very sorry to hear that more than himself were compelled to look about them at this particular juncture.

“ ’Deed they have, sir. Master got three letters by the post yesterday, and at night there was a coffin placed on the hall steps.”

“Come, that’s threat enough in all conscience, my good fellow. I suppose the rascals durst not venture to rouse the master with so many grooms about the place ?”

“Mr. Philips desired me to show you into the room where he has his friends, sir,” said the old footman, bustling before the new corner. “This way, if you please, sir,” and he opened the door of the dining-room and announced Mr. Gladstone.

Mr. Philips came forward to greet him. He was a large, florid complexioned man, with much more of good nature than cleverness depicted in his jovial looking face.

“I’m glad to see you, Mr. Gladstone,” he

said, holding out his hand. “ Mr. Browne, Mr. Gladstone. Mr. Young and Mr. Hill I think you know. Let us have some clean glasses, John. Come, Mr. Gladstone, take a chair amongst us,” and, resuming his seat, he began to play with his gold watch chain.

He had no conversational powers ; but William knew his man, and began speaking at once.

“ What is the matter in the iron and steel trade, gentlemen, that I find you all assembled here this morning ?”

Mr. Philips rattled his chain seals, and knit his brows, as if in great perplexity. His partner, Mr. Young, gave a hearty “ damme,” whilst Mr. Browne threw himself back in his chair, exclaiming—

“ There is matter enough, Mr. Gladstone, to make the boldest amongst us tremble.”

“ The long and the short of it is, gentlemen,” said William, with a smile, “ you have been threatened.”

They had, every one of them.

“ Our foes must feel their strength, then. They would scarcely have dared to threaten, and throw down the gauntlet, unless they were very confident of success.”

“ I hear they’re six thousand strong,” said Browne, who was the youngest of the party; a bold-looking man, with short, black hair, and a bull neck, “ and, damme, Mr. Gladstone, I believe it.”

“ And I,” cried Hill.

“ And so do I,” both rejoined Philips and his partner.

“ I’ve had three threatening letters, and a coffin,” said Mr. Philips, piteously.

“ A dozen saucy, hang-dog looking villains favoured me with a call,” said Browne, with a sarcastic smile. “ Curse ’em, they got more than they expected by their visit. I set my bull-dog upon them, and it would have done your hearts good to see how the cowardly vagabonds took to their heels. ’Pon my life, I laughed till I almost cried.”

Philips and Young laughed in chorus, and

Mr. Phillips determined to get a bull-dog the next day, in case he should be favoured in his turn.

“I have been to York this morning,” said William, who thought it best to know what they intended doing. “I rode over to see what aid we might depend on from the military.”

“And what promise did Colonel Stopford give you, Mr. Gladstone?” demanded Mr. Phillips.

“He promised not to help us,” said Mr. Gladstone, with a grim smile.

“They’ve sent a troop to Manchester, and by heaven, sir, they must and shall do the same by us,” exclaimed Browne.

“I am afraid you could not convince Colonel Stopford of the necessity,” said William, bitterly. “He says he cannot break through the regulations of the service; he must first receive orders from head quarters.”

“From head-quarters! Curse him and his head quarters too,” cried Browne.

“Aye, and if he has to send to head-

quarters our factories may all be burnt down by the time he gets his orders," said Mr. Philips, excitedly.

"Curse me if I'll ask any of them for help," said Browne, striking the table with a fist that might have felled an ox. "I'll arm my men with good stout blackthorn sticks, and if any of the cursed Union men come to see me, I'll send them away with something more than a flea in their ears ; aye, and quicker than my bull-dog made them scuttle off last night."

"A great many of our men are Unionists, I'm afraid," said Mr. Young, with an uneasy glance at his partner ; "at least one half, I should say ; and if we were to arm them to defend us, in nine cases out of ten we should be aiding them, in all probability, instead of defending ourselves against our foes."

"I don't think they'll come as far as my place," said Mr. Hill, with a self-satisfied smile. "If they do, I'll drench them with

the fire-engine, and give them a good ducking for their pains."

"They won't be deterred by that, sir," said Mr. Gladstone, who alone did not applaud the idea with a laugh. "I think Mr. Browne's idea is the best, and if we all agree to aid each other, I think we need not regret the want of the military. It seems Mr. Browne's men and mine are to be depended on standing by us in the matter, and I propose that we plant a guard, in turn, round our works at night, to defeat the machinations of the rascally Unionists."

"With all my heart," said Browne, emptying the decanter into the tumbler he had before him. "Do you all agree to that?"

Philips and Young were only too happy to accede to the arrangement, conscious as they were how little reason they had to depend upon their own men. Now Philips, in fact, would have yielded long ago to the demands of the Union, had he not dreaded the ridicule

of his neighbours ; and this weakness, curiously enough, only made him more detested by his opponents, who hated his cowardly vacillation more intensely than Mr. Gladstone's open, manly defiance.

“ Well, then, gentlemen, I propose we go about our business again,” said Browne, pushing back his chair. “ Your way and mine, Mr. Gladstone, are on the same road, and we can easily arrange our operations as we go along. Dang it ! the idea of a brush with the rascals sets one's blood all a dancing in one's veins. I should immensely have liked being a soldier.”

“ Could you not send us over a few men to night, Browne ?” asked Mr. Philips, who trembled through all his ponderous limbs like an aspen leaf. “ We may be all in a blaze by the morning, for what we can tell.”

“ No ! no ! To-morrow night at the earliest is all we can promise,” rejoined the other, carelessly, as he shook hands all round. “ Don't frighten yourself, old boy, in that

manner. The rascals are not prepared to strike yet."

"I don't know that; they'll come like a thief in the night, when they do come," said Mr. Philips.

"And we'll shoot them down like so many dogs," said Browne, in great delight. "Come, Gladstone, let's be off."

"We will let you know to-morrow what we decide upon, Mr. Philips," said William, as they stood at the front door. "I think we need scarcely dread their coming to-night," and he gave him a parting shake of the hand, and rode away.

CHAPTER XIII.

“YOU'RE just the fellow I want, Gladstone,” cried Mr. Browne, gaily, pulling up his horse, which was as strong and black as himself, alongside William's mare, after they had ridden a couple of miles on their way home. “I've long had a desire to play the spy upon these infernal Union men ; but, dang it ! until I fell in with you, I couldn't think of anyone that had courage to join me.”

“What do you mean ?” asked his companion, who scarcely understood him.

“One of our men belongs to the Union, though he has not much fancy for the business, and he told me a day or two ago the

Unionists were to have a grand meeting to-night, to discuss their wrongs, and determine the reprisals on their masters. You and I are sure to be marked out first for vengeance, and I mean to go to the meeting dressed as a working man, and discover what they intend doing. It's a capital idea, isn't it?"

"But how are you to get into the room?" asked William, who felt a great inclination to accompany him. "I understand they are very cautious who they admit."

"Brewster will take us. They know Brewster well, and fancy he's heart and soul with them. Come, say the word, and it's a bargain. They meet at nine o'clock, and if you come down to my place a trifle before that hour I'll have a suit of fustians ready, and we'll go down with Brewster, and get an inkling into their intentions."

"If we should be detected?"

"Detected!" echoed Browne, who insensibly relapsed into the Yorkshire dialect whenever he got vexed, "Dang it, Gladstone! I

thought thee a pluckier fellow than thou turn'st out to be. Come, we'll drop the subject," and Browne rode on with a scornful sneer on his swarthy visage.

"It's only running the risk of a few hard knocks," said William, laughing, as he joined his companion again. "I'm your man, Mr. Browne! I'll be at your house between eight and nine to-night."

"Thou'rt a man in a thousand, after all, lad!" exclaimed Browne, grasping William's hand in his huge horny fist. "There's no need to be alarmed, for they daren't harm us, even if we are found out. We'll disguise ourselves, however, so that even our own mothers wouldn't know us," and he laughed with delight at the idea of outwitting the Unionists.

"What's the use of going back to Braidsworth at all, Gladstone?" he demanded, the next moment. "Come on to Bradford with me, and stay at my house till night. Thou wants a bit of rest, after riding all night."

"I must go home," said William, picturing

to himself the uneasiness of his sisters at his long absence. "Don't be afraid that I shall fail you."

"I'se not afraid, man! Thou'st given me thy word, and that's enough," said Browne, good-naturedly. "Well, I suppose we part here," he added, as they came to a cross-road, which led in one direction to Bradford, and in the other to Braidsworth. "Good-bye for a bit," and he shook hands again; then putting his horse into a gallop, rode away, humming a hornpipe.

"He's as bold as the devil!" muttered William, as he looked after Browne's receding figure; "now for an explosion from old Hannah," and he smiled unconsciously as he busied himself with picturing her reproachful complaints for the trouble he had caused her.

"Where have you been all day, William?" said Kate, who was the first person he saw, on entering the house. "Frances told me you had ridden over to York."

"And am back again, Kate," rejoined her

brother, in a tone of voice that completely reassured her, for Kate was very timid, and dreaded the rioters almost as much as she did the fever.

“ Will you have some dinner, or shall I get you a cup of tea ? ”

“ Some tea, if you please. Where is Frances ? ” he asked.

“ Down at the Rectory. By-the-bye, William, the oddest thing in the world has happened since you left us. The key of the back door has been lost, and no one can account for it.”

“ That is a very extraordinary circumstance, Kate. Hannah must have laid it away, and can’t recollect where.”

Kate shook her head, as she said—

“ Hannah declares she left it in the door,” but the smile that would show itself, in spite of himself, on her brother’s face revealed the truth to her.

“ How mischievous of you, William. If you could only have seen us climbing out of

the kitchen window whenever we wanted to get into the pantry—oh ! it's very ridiculous,” and Kate ran off with the key to annoy poor old Hannah still more with the mystery.

There had been a great appearance of rain all day, and by the time William had got his tea it came down in good earnest. Frances arrived from the Rectory completely drenched, bringing with her rather melancholy forebodings from Amelia Vinen, that it would scarcely be possible the next day could be fine enough to go to “Sunnyside.”

“ If we wait patiently, Frances, we shall see,” said her brother, with his usual composure. “ I am glad the rain has come. One has quite got to loathe this sunny weather; it has lasted so very long.”

“ We rarely have to complain of such a fault in England,” observed Frances, who was all life and animation ; perhaps, because Captain Vinen had insisted upon accompanying her from the Rectory to carry her umbrella. “ You must be very tired, William.”

“ I don’t feel the loss of my night’s rest, in the least. That would have been nothing had I succeeded in my object. However, we must make up our minds, as we cannot get assistance, to aid ourselves.”

Frances looked so calm and secure that her brother hoped she scarcely understood the risk they ran. She was, however, perfectly aware of it, but she was constitutionally courageous, and what would have horrified Kate scarcely agitated her younger sister, or made her heart beat quicker than its wont.

“ Are you going out again to-night, brother ?” asked Frances, after having settled down to her work.

“ For a short time. I have to see someone on business. I shall not be detained long.”

She suspected the business was of no very pleasant nature ; but she made no remark at the moment, and William soon after arose and went out.

He was almost wet through by the time he got to Bradford, notwithstanding the thick

overcoat he put on, and never did the town look more dismal and forlorn to his eye than as he rode through the streets, with the smoke of numerous factories hanging like a pall over the silent buildings that were scarcely visible by the light of the flickering oil lamps placed at considerable distances from each other in the deserted streets.

Browne was waiting, ready dressed, for him, with the man Brewster, who was to be their guide.

“I thought the rain would have prevented your coming, Mr. Gladstone,” said Browne, as he opened the door and admitted him into a small sitting-room. “It is nine o’clock already, and it will take us a quarter of an hour to walk to the place of meeting. Take off your clothes and put on these; I think they’ll fit you tolerably well.”

William perceived that there were three pistols lying on the table. Browne laughed as he took one up and put it into his breast pocket, saying, drily, as he did so—

“I intend to be both forewarned and fore-armed, you perceive.”

“A good precaution, although I trust we shall not require such befriending,” said William, who by this time had changed his garments. “You have guessed my size to a hair’s breadth.”

“And a deuced good-looking workman you make in fustians, Gladstone,” said his companion, turning him round and round. “Now wash your hands in that mixture,” pointing to a bowl of dark coloured liquid that stood beside the pistols; “such lily white paws as you’ve got would betray everything.”

William did so, and then, concealing his pistols in the same manner as Browne had done, the three men each drank a glass of brandy, and started on their somewhat perilous errand.

Brewster walked first at a quick pace, diving into bye lanes which were quite unknown to Mr. Gladstone, who only judged, from the frequent plunges he made into rather

deep pools of water and mud, that little attention was paid to the paving and flagging of that quarter of the town, and more than once he came in contact with a projection in a wall that formed the boundary of the path they travelled.

After a few minutes' sharp walking, they came to the back entrance of a public-house, and Brewster whispering to his master that this was the place of meeting, they walked slowly along until they met a man whom William conjectured to be the landlord, and who, merely observing that it was a rough night, permitted them to proceed until the passage opened out into a tolerably spacious yard, dimly lighted by a solitary lamp that only made visible the squalid untidiness that reigned over the precincts.

“A cursed ugly place for a scuffle,” muttered Browne, pausing for a moment to peer into the almost total darkness that enveloped it. “We’re in for it now, however,” and he stumbled after Brewster over broken pig

troughs, decayed barrels, and all the filth that had been accumulating in this ill-favoured spot for the last two years or more.

“For heaven’s sake! be cool, gentlemen,” whispered their guide, as he waited for them to join him at the foot of a flight of stairs that evidently led to a large loft. The words were scarcely out of his mouth before they were confronted by two thin, wiry looking men, with whom Brewster exchanged a few words in an under tone, and then Gladstone and Browne found themselves in the presence of a large number of men, who were closely wedged into a dense mass in front of a kind of rude platform that had been erected at the further end of the building, evidently more for use than for show.

There were, probably, five hundred persons in the room, and the smell that exhaled from so many greasy fustians, soaked with wet, was anything but agreeable to Gladstone’s fine senses. The loft was lit by a few guttering candles stuck into a large hoop in the

centre of the place ; on the platform a table was placed, on which stood candles placed in a couple of stone beer-bottles. The platform was crowded with dark, eager looking men, and from the whole body arose a confused hum of many tongues, as if every one was discussing his particular grievance in an undertone to his neighbour.

Brewster planted himself against the wall, under the shade of a large beam that came down from the ceiling, and his companions, following his example, prepared to listen to the proceedings. They were so far removed from the lights that they were in almost total darkness, invisible to most of the others assembled, but enabled to see pretty plainly everything that was going on at a distance. Gladstone noticed with some surprise that young Harry Jobson, who has been mentioned as Sarah Crisp's lover, was somewhat conspicuously placed just beneath the platform.

After a short time there was a stir and bustle in front of the platform, and the next

minute a flashily dressed, rather good looking man, of about three or four and thirty, came forward, and, thrusting his hands beneath his coat tails, began a frothy and specious address, denouncing the masters as a set of hard-hearted tyrants, who ought to be hanged for grinding the poor man in the way the vile manufacturers were doing, but which the Union would shortly teach them would, unless they changed their barbarous conduct, be the signing of their own death warrants.

“Tolerable that, eh?” whispered Browne, in rather a loud tone. “Come, that will do.”

“That’s their fancy orator, Mr. Smooth, as they call him,” whispered Brewster, who knew the names of all the leaders.

The “fancy orator,” as Brewster announced him, had scarcely sat down before an old man arose from the extreme end of the platform, and begged permission to add a few words to what the gentleman who had just spoken had urged upon the notice of the meeting.

There was a remarkable wildness in the

appearance of this old man that attracted Mr. Gladstone's attention, and even won his sympathy, much more so than the flashy, clap-trap address of Smooth. Tall, and very thin, with an awkward attempt at ease, that only made his ungainly figure more conspicuous, he was one of the last people in the world you would have expected to find standing forward to address some hundreds of the keen, critical men of Yorkshire, whose pale, earnest countenances were upturned before him. His face was very pale, and looked almost unearthly, with two dark, gleaming eyes flashing beneath the shaggy lids, that in general almost concealed them from view.

“I am a forgeman,” he said, his further speech being interrupted by a short hacking cough, that seemed to rend his frame, and which illustrated well enough his next words. “I fear you will think I have no business here—”

“Ye have! ye have!” cried a hundred voices in a breath. “Go on, old chap.”

“ I will go on then, mates,” he said, as a melancholy smile for a moment lit up his haggard features. “ These be terrible times, my lads, for us working men, though the drones that fatten on the honey we gather for them think differently. We’ve tried fair means long enow with ‘em, and now we’ll try foul means. We’ve sent dippyitations round to ivry master, and they won’t heed what we’ve got to say. There’s but one remedy left us, and it’s a varra fearful one—”

“ Name it! name it!” cried his excited listeners.

“ We’ll fire the factories, one by one!” cried the old man, holding straight out his thin arms, whilst his eyes gleamed like glow-worms beneath his shaggy brows. “ There’s nothing else left for us to do.”

“ The infamous old villain!” exclaimed Browne, forgetting, in his indignation, the dangerous men by whom he was surrounded.

“ There are traitors in the camp!” cried a stentorian voice from the middle of the room,

and Gladstone and his two companions saw that every eye was turned to the spot where they stood.

“Seize the traitors! Strangle the villains! Gag them?” cried a hundred voices.

“It’s that bloodthirsty devil, Browne! Strangle the spies!” said a voice close by.

In the midst of all the wild uproar, and before one of the three had a hand laid upon him the platform fell with a tremendous crash, and at the same moment the hoop that supported the candles in the centre of the room by some means got involved in the general wreck, and the whole place was left in utter darkness.

“Where are the spies?” roared a hundred voices in William Gladstone’s ears, as he felt himself hustled and pushed by the crowd; and so furious, in fact, was the onslaught he would have been trodden down, and in all probability killed, had not a strong arm, which he supposed to be Browne’s, upheld him.

“The floor is giving way!” roared a stentorian voice above all the din, and that selfish love of life which predominates over all the passions of human nature, in a moment induced everyone to gain the door, through the narrow opening of which the bewildered and frightened Union men rushed pell mell like a flock of sheep driven by the shepherd’s dog.

“Be firm, and make a rush with the rest, and we’ll get safe out,” whispered Browne, whose iron nerves made him regard the whole affair with as much indifference as if he had been present at a play. “Follow that great broad-shouldered forgeman!” Still keeping hold of William’s arm, and assisted by Brewster, they squeezed and elbowed their way out, at times completely lifted off their feet by the pressure from behind, until they found themselves in the open street, with the rain still pouring down in a torrent that acted as an effectual disperser of the crowd.

They took care not to look about them till they got into a respectable part of the town,

and then Browne shook himself like a huge water-dog, and burst out into an uproarious fit of laughter.

“ We’ve had a jolly row, lads, haven’t we ? ” he said, slapping Gladstone on the back. “ Bless me, man ! how my heart went pit-a-pat, when I saw the infuriated beasts come rushing towards us. Did you ever see such an awful lot of devils, Gladstone ? ”

“ I certainly never did, Mr. Browne,” said William. “ I wonder who it was befriended us by extinguishing the lights ? ”

“ Some one that had no love for the Union. I have no doubt it was done on purpose. Well, it shall be a long time before I enter upon another such an escapade, I promise you. Dang it, we might have been murdered ! ”

“ Might have been,” rejoined Gladstone ; “ we should have been without judge or jury. What a horrible night it is ! ”

“ Beastly ! Come, we’ll have a bit of something to eat, and another pull at the brandy, and then you may just both take yourselves off

home. Weren't you in a devil of a fright, Brewster?"

"I was, indeed, sir. I thought of my wife and the bairns when I heard that infernal fiend yell out 'Traitors!' It was an awful shriek.

"There's one thing pretty certain, they'll break up without deciding whose place should be fired first."

"It will be either mine or yours, I've no doubt," said Gladstone.

"To a certainty," said Browne; "but that need not disturb us to-night. We mustn't let Philips and Young know of this bit of mischief, at any rate. Here's my house, so step in, lads."

A Yorkshire ham, a crusty loaf, and a tankard of ale were soon on the table, and they all three ate and drank with good will.

By the time they had finished their repast it was eleven o'clock, and Mr. Gladstone was about to sally forth to go home, when Browne suddenly declared it was unsafe for such a

marked man to go alone a distance at that time of night.

“ Just put the old pony into the gig, Brewster,” he said, “ and I’ll drive you home myself, Mr. Gladstone; you’re too good a man for those cut-throat fellows to make a target of,” and as William had had full proof of Browne’s dogged self-will, he complied without a word.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next morning a brilliant sunshine and a cloudless sky succeeded to the stormy, miserable night we have described. The earth, parched with the long drought, had drunk in with eagerness the copious showers that had fallen, and June—pleasant June—never looked more fresh and lovely than on the day when William Gladstone and his sisters left home to keep their appointment at ‘Sunnyside’—and ‘Sunnyside’ it really was.

Kate had already culled a beautiful bouquet by the time Frances came down, and was all impatience to be on the road. William,

however, had not come up from the Foundry, and Frances, who knew something of the risk that her brother ran at this time, more than suspected they were not to go after all.

“I hope, Frances, the breeze won’t go down until we get to ‘Sunnyside,’ ” Kate said, after a pause. “The air smells so very sweet after the refreshing rains of last night.”

“It is a beautiful morning,” said Frances, abstractedly, for her thoughts were fixed on a far different subject. “I wish our brother would come, Kate.”

“He is poring over those horrid plans, I suppose,” said Kate, petulantly. “How hateful it must be to have one’s husband what they call a man of business.”

“Do you think so, Kate?”

“They are all so horribly selfish, and care about nothing but their shops and factories, Frances. It must be more pleasant to be the wife of a country gentleman, whose time is all his own.”

“Like William Wilding, eh, Kate?”

“ Well ! like William Wilding, if you wish it,” retorted Kate, looking up and blushing.

“ What about William Wilding ?” asked Mr. Gladstone, overhearing the words as he entered the room.

“ Ask Kate, brother,” said Frances.

“ Nay, Frances ; you mentioned William Wilding’s name. It was something about—but no matter. Pray let us get breakfast and be gone,” said Kate, confusedly.

“ The phaeton will be here in half an hour, so you must look sharp,” said William, as he began to cut the cold tongue that was placed before him. “ It is going to be a glorious day. I declare, Kate has quite lost her appetite.”

“ I always do when I am going away for the day,” she said, pleasantly. “ Hannah, please tie those flowers up for me.”

“ To be sure I will, Miss Kate,” said the old servant, good humouredly. “ Here are the three cloaks for ye ; it may rain when ye come back.”

“ Rain ! with such an unclouded sky, you silly old Hannah.”

“ ’Deed, Miss Frances, I’ve seen many as fine a day end wi’ storms afore now,” said old Hannah, with a sigh. “ Come, here’s the phaeton in the yard, and ye may as well be off and get your bonnets,” and Frances slipped away to make her simple toilet, and then, hearing her brother’s voice in the hall calling for her to come, she ran downstairs to give her parting injunctions to Hannah, after which they were soon happily driving down the little lane that led out upon the high road to ‘ Sunnyside.’

They could not have chosen a more pleasant day for such an excursion, for there was just breeze enough to subdue the heat of the sun without disturbing the dust that had been laid by the previous night’s rain.

Kate was delighted with everything she saw : now calling her sister’s attention to the hawthorns, white as snow, with “ May,” as they call it in the North, standing out in de-

tached clumps in the dewy meadows ; now clapping her hands in almost childish glee as she caught a glimpse of a timid doe with her graceful fawn stealing away under the shade of Squire West's ancestral elms.

Frances's joy was of a quieter kind, but, perhaps, more real, for the landscape looked so beautiful that she would have liked above all things to have been permitted to enjoy it in silence all the way to 'Sunnyside.'

The white blossom of the plum and apple trees made them look as if they had been surprised by a snow storm ; farm yards, snug with corn stacks, and noisy with cackling hens and bleating calves ; villages still and deserted as if it were the depth of midnight ; and, after a time, came the park gates of 'Sunnyside,' opened by the gatekeeper's wife, who had been waiting in the porch ready to receive them with a smiling welcome.

'Sunnyside' was not what is termed a show place, although the grounds were considered very beautiful, and many people came

from a much greater distance than Halifax to enjoy a summer day's ramble amongst its wild wood walks and romantic glades. It had, however, a much greater charm than any mere show place can have—a charm which made even Mr. Gladstone admire it, and that was its air of still and solemn antiquity.

The old house stood upon a lawn of the greenest velvet, backed by fine old trees, of which any nobleman, whose ancestors came in with William the Norman, might have been proud. A few grand old elms and gnarled oaks were scattered about the turf, and this was divided from the rest of the park by a terrace, the stonework of which had been for the greater part of a century entirely concealed by a profusion of creeping plants, that gave it the appearance of a hedge of unfading green. The house itself was two stories high, the balconies jutting out with audacious irregularity, and had no end of diamond-paned lattices, fantastic gables, and superfluous chimneys, not one of which would

Miss Coulson have parted with for the world.

She met her friends in the porch with a frank welcome and heightened colour, chiding them for coming late, and leading them at once to a morning room, already pretty well filled with people, most of whom they had seen before at 'Sunnyside.'

"Go and speak to mamma, Mr. Gladstone," she said, peeping in and then, drawing Frances and Kate back again, continued "Come this way, girls, and throw aside your bonnets and shawls. You will want some breakfast after such an early drive," and as she withdrew with her companions Mr. Gladstone went to pay his compliments to Mrs. Coulson.

She was a lively, keen-looking little woman, and had the reputation of having been pretty in her youth. Dressed in black satin, with an Indian shawl thrown over her shoulders, she looked almost pretty even yet, though her hair was beginning to turn grey, and exacting

Time had planted more than one crow's-foot around the flashing eyes that looked their brightest on this occasion.

“I am delighted to see you, Mr. William,” she said, shaking him warmly by the hand, “why have you been such a stranger of late at ‘Sunnyside?’”

“I have been so immersed in business, my dear madam,” he replied, “that I have had but little time to call even upon such a kind friend as Mrs. Coulson.”

“A very poor excuse,” said his lively hostess. “I hope you have brought all your sisters.”

“All but Sophia, who is at present on a visit to her uncle Newman.”

“I must call and see Miss Gladstone some day soon,” said Mrs. Coulson, whose keen eyes had already forewarned her of the entrance of Dr. Vinen's family. “Excuse me for a minute, Mr. William,” and she slipped away to welcome them.

Miss Coulson had certainly invited all her friends on this eventful day, and William felt

more than half tempted to wish himself quietly back in his office, when he saw what a laughing, flirting, quizzically disposed set he had fallen amongst. There was Dr. Vinen, portly and loud-voiced, as became the Rector of Braidsworth, and beside him stood the shadowy Curate of Sunnyside.

Shadowy the Curate was, both in purse and person, for his income was little more than a hundred pounds per annum—large enough, some said, for his height, which was only five feet two. He had a weak voice, to match these two qualifications, and a subdued, care-worn face, that hinted pretty strongly he was not very happy. He had a mother living in cheap lodgings at some obscure village in Cornwall, to whom it was suspected he allowed half his magnificent income, poor fellow, and he would have found the remainder less than sufficient had not Miss Coulson some time before imbibed a sudden passion for learning Latin. She paid him liberally, but made very little progress.

Sitting on a couch near the window, so that he might bask in the sunlight, William next observed Miss Coulson's guardian, Mr. Banks, a gruff, ungracious old man, dressed in a pepper-and-salt coat of antiquated cut, a waistcoat of a gaudy flower pattern, and knee-buckles. Mr. Banks had amassed a very large fortune entirely by his own skill and industry, having begun the world without a sixpence, and many of the vulgar prejudices he had imbibed in his youth still clung to him. One of Squire Wilson's handsome daughters was sitting beside him, driving him almost distracted with her merry rattle.

“How d'ye do, Gladstone?” he said, extending a sinewy hand and grasping that of William like a vice, “I scarcely should have thought of meeting you here.”

“Nor I you, Mr. Banks,” rejoined William, “I thought you avoided dissipations of this kind.”

“Mrs. Coulson would take no refusal,” said Mr. Banks, eyeing the talkative lady from

beneath his shaggy brows. “ Will ye hold your noise a wee bit, Miss Wilson,” he added, turning sharp round upon his lady companion, who laughed more than ever at him.

“ For shame, Mr. Banks,” said Miss Wilson, shaking her fan at him.

“ It’s no shame at all, my lass,” he said, angrily; “ I want to ha’ a bit talk wi’ Gladstone here. What’s the state of the markets?”

“ Falling lower and lower every day, I am sorry to say.”

“ Aye, and they’ll fall still lower yet. What are the Union men about, pray?”

“ No good, I’m afraid,” said William, “ they threaten, in pretty strong terms, to burn every mill and foundry in the district if we don’t yield to their demands.”

“ Ye’re a cowardly lot!” retorted Mr. Banks, with a sneer. “ When I was a young man, afore one of the foundry owners that were in Halifax would have given in they’d have let

themselves be torn limb from limb by wild horses. But what do *you* intend to do, lad?"

"To refuse their demands, of course," said William.

"Right! Hang me, but I like your spirit Gladstone. What's the matter, hinney?" on noticing that Miss Wilson was making a loud outcry against him.

"Oh! Mr. Banks, you have spoiled my scarf," groaned the lady, as she rescued the gossamer fragments of her dress from beneath that portion of the couch on which Mr. Banks had been sitting.

"It had no business where it was, Miss Wilson," he said gruffly; "don't make such a clatter about it; a needle and thread 'll soon put it to rights again."

It was a great relief to William that Captain Vinen at this moment came up and drew him away.

"Let us get into the open air," said the

Captain, looking very hot and very uncomfortable, “what a mob of people there are about one to be sure.”

“Few of whom, I suspect, you know, Alfred, eh?”

“Scarcely one. Your sisters are walking with Amelia on the terrace. Shall we join them?”

“Anything is preferable to this intolerable crowd. Where is Miss Coulson?”

“I scarcely know. I say, William, who is that haughty looking gentleman in such close confab with Miss Coulson’s mamma?”

William looked in the direction Captain Vinen pointed out, and for the first time noticed a very handsome man, who was evidently a clergyman, seated on the couch beside Mrs. Coulson. They were conversing very earnestly, and yet, notwithstanding the interest they both evidently felt in the conversation, the young men could not help noticing that the supercilious expression of countenance the clergyman betrayed never forsook him.

Just at that moment William happened to glance towards the door, which Miss Coulson was entering with an eager step, and the same sunny smile that had illumined her features throughout the morning. She advanced a few steps, and then observing her mother and this gentleman seated together, a sudden paleness chased away the rose bloom, a spasm marred the beauty of her face as she stole up to Mrs. Vinen's chair.

William felt that something was the matter, but he could not divine what, so he summoned a little diplomacy to his aid.

“ Alfred, don't you think your mother would like a walk on the terrace ? ” he said, very quietly.

“ Eh ! what ? Oh ! she'll do very well where she is , ” said Alfred.

“ I'm sure she looks faint. Come, we'll go and speak to her . ”

And William moved off in the direction of Mrs. Vinen.

Captain Vinen followed and rejoined him

just as his friend was recommending Mrs. Vinen and Miss Coulson to take a turn on the terrace.

“Mother, take my arm,” said the Captain, with the freedom of a favourite child; “this room is really not fit for a Christian to breathe in. Miss Coulson, make Gladstone happy by giving him the opportunity of rescuing you from certain death.”

“I shall be very pleased to get a breath of fresh air,” said Agatha, hurriedly; “this room is really terribly warm.”

It must have been to have taken all the colour from her cheeks so wonderfully as it had done in the last half dozen minutes.

They were threading their way through the crowd, when Agatha’s name was called behind them, and Mrs. Coulson hurried up.

“Only think how charming, my love. By the strangest chance in the world Mr. Briscoe has just come from Scarborough.”

William felt the little hand that rested on his arm tremble as she turned round to wel-

come Mr. Briscoe. Her words were quite inaudible; but Mrs. Coulson did not notice this.

“ It only needed this happy *contretemps* to make our little entertainment a most delightful *réunion*,” said Mrs. Coulson, who seemed to see no one but this Mr. Briscoe. “ Mr. Gladstone, I think you have met Mr. Briscoe before.”

Mr. Gladstone had not, but he did not care to say so. He only felt for Miss Coulson, who was evidently ill at ease.

“ We were going upon the terrace,” said Mrs. Vinen at this juncture; “ perhaps Mr. Briscoe will join us?”

“ I shall be very pleased to do so,” said Mr. Briscoe, with great hauteur, and he placed himself on the other side of Miss Coulson, who relinquished William’s arm, and walked silent and restless between them.

The terrace was certainly a very charming place, with flower beds and clumps of roses set in the velvet turf, commanding a view

of the park with the masses of elm and beech beyond it ; but beautiful as it looked in the shifting sunshine and shadow, it did not please Mr. Briscoe.

“ You promised me, Agatha, you would have those trees thinned before I came back again,” he said, with a freedom that ruffled William inconceivably.

“ We did not expect you back so soon,” she replied, with what William fancied to be a contemptuous tone ; “ and besides, Mr. Banks would not consent.”

“ He certainly could not have known it was my wish as well as your own.”

“ I think it would quite spoil the effect,” said Mr. Gladstone, addressing Miss Coulson. “ Recollect you can at any time cut those fine fellows down, Miss Agatha ; but it would take more than a lifetime to restore them, if you wished it. Besides, they are quite far enough removed from the house to disarm any objection against making it gloomy. I

certainly would not cut them down if they were mine.”

Mr. Briscoe’s face said as plainly as face could speak—

“Who the devil are you, sir, to stand between my requests and a few paltry trees? If I wish Miss Coulson to cut them every one down and leave her park as bare as a fallow field, you shall not interfere, I promise you.”

“I think you are quite right, Mr. Gladstone,” said Miss Coulson, with more spirit than Mr. Briscoe fancied she possessed; “I certainly will not have my beeches cut down.”

“As you please, Agatha,” said Mr. Briscoe, in a cold tone.

Kate and Frances were sitting on a turf seat at the end of the terrace, with Mrs. Vinen and several gentlemen, amongst whom were William Wilding and Captain Vinen. Miss Coulson took the only unoccupied place, and began to chat merrily, whilst a footman

handed refreshments. Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Briscoe were thus left standing together.

“ Scarborough, I suppose, is filling very fast,” observed Mr. Gladstone, who felt himself compelled to talk in spite of his dislike to his companion.

“ I’m sure I can’t tell, sir. I only went there from Devonshire two days ago,” replied Mr. Briscoe. “ I hate the mob of a fashionable watering-place.”

William thought the worst mob that ever flocked there could not be more vulgar than Mr. Briscoe ; but he remained silent, and began wondering how that gentleman came to appear amongst them on this very morning ; and he arrived at the conclusion, at last, that Mrs. Coulson had written for him. Mr. Briscoe was evidently Miss Coulson’s lover ; yet he fancied he detected unmistakeable signs in that young lady’s behaviour that showed pretty plainly she more than disliked him.

“ Let us have a stroll through the woods,” cried Kate, jumping up. “ The last time we

were here, Agatha, we had a glorious scramble. I recollect I tore a new silk spencer wofully, and nearly sprained my ankle. Come, who votes for my proposition?"

"I for one," said Wilding, offering her his arm.

Mr. Gladstone chanced to be next Miss Coulson.

"May I have the pleasure?" he said, colouring, in spite of himself, and offering his arm.

She looked quickly round, and caught Mr. Briscoe's stern eyes fixed upon her. Nevertheless she would not accept *his* escort, so she said in the hurried tone that had jarred so painfully upon William's ear once before on this eventful morning—

"No, thank you; I must go in to see if mamma needs my help."

And she arose to go back to the house.

"Then I will go and sit in the drawing-room," William said, in a low voice. "The heat of the air oppresses me."

He walked back with her along the terrace.

“Who is Mr. Briscoe?” he asked, on noticing that gentleman, instead of accompanying them, was strolling across the park towards one of the doomed clumps of trees about which they had had the discussion. “I don’t think I ever heard of him before.”

“A relative of mamma’s. He has a living in Devonshire. I wonder you never met him here before.”

“He comes pretty often,” thought her companion, gloomily; and then he added aloud, “He seems to be a great favourite with Mrs. Coulson.”

She sighed, but did not reply; and the sigh made him nearly desperate. He could have killed poor Mr. Briscoe at that moment.

“I am afraid you will find the drawing-room a not very pleasant place to sit in,” Agatha said, kindly, as they entered the hall. “It is so crowded with noisy, chattering people, whom you don’t know. Come in here.”

She led him into the library, which faced the north, and was as still and pleasant as painted window and high bookcases, filled with books, could make it.

“No one will disturb you here.”

She stole away and closed the door before he had time to answer her.

In an odd state of bewilderment, Mr. Gladstone seated himself in a luxurious easy chair, and tried to think calmly and coolly of Mr. Briscoe and Miss Coulson; but for a long time he was so perplexed he found the task very difficult. The blush that mantled Agatha's face as she left the room, the sigh that escaped her when he observed Mr. Briscoe was a great favourite with Mrs. Coulson, and the alteration in her appearance when she first discovered that gentleman's arrival, all came to his memory, mingled with the haughty yet handsome face, and the evident loathing she had for her intended husband.

It was clearly a long settled arrangement that she was to marry Mr. Briscoe, yet he

had never heard of it before the night at Braidsworth Rectory, and had scarcely believed it at the time.

He believed it now.

After a time a manlier feeling came over him, and he began to reason more seriously. A book lay open on the table, as if it had been lately read, and he glanced at it with some curiosity, for he fancied Miss Coulson had been reading it, and he wondered what were her studies. It was a volume of "Spenser's Faerie Queen," and he began to read where he thought she had left off, feeling a pleasure in the wild and beautiful story of Una that he had never experienced before; and whilst becoming more alive to the feminine beauty of Agatha's character, was convinced she was far too good for Mr. Briscoe.

But he forgot everything that had occurred during the day in the exquisite pleasure he felt when at night, Frances being already seated in the phaeton, they stood together

under the cloudless sky, and Agatha's little hand lay for a moment trembling in his.

He saw nothing but her graceful, drooping figure as she stood on the steps, the blush and the smile illuminating the sweet face that was but dimly seen through the veil she had tied over her head. He did not notice Mr. Briscoe, solemn and haughty as ever, standing in the shadow of the entrance-hall ; he was deaf to Mr. Banks' awful voice, in no measured terms cursing his coachman for not being punctual to his time.

Under the cloudless sky William and Agatha parted on the most eventful evening in the lives of both.

CHAPTER XV.

“How have you enjoyed your visit, William?” was Frances’ first question, as soon as they were started on the road homewards. “I have scarcely seen you since the morning, and Kate and I were both sadly puzzled to guess what could have become of you.”

“I got tired of rambling about amidst such a noisy crowd, and took refuge in the library,” was the answer, abstractedly given. “I hope you have been gratified.”

“Very much indeed. Who is that haughty gentleman, I wonder, who seems to consider he has a right to monopolise Miss Coulson in such a ridiculous manner?”

“A Mr. Briscoe.”

“ Briscoe ! I never heard the name before. He seemed to drop from the moon to disturb all of us. Amelia Vinen told me he and Agatha are engaged, but I’m quite certain Agatha hates him most cordially.”

“ You think so, do you, Frances ?”

“ I do, brother ; I watched her countenance when he came up and spoke to her. She turned as pale as if she were going to faint. Where does he come from, pray ?”

“ Devonshire, I understand.”

“ I am glad he’s not a Yorkshireman,” she said, emphatically. “ They may tolerate such uncivil behaviour in that part of the kingdom, but it won’t suit us here. I wonder whether he is rich.”

“ I fancy not ; I think it’s Miss Coulson’s money, rather than her person, he wants to wed,” said William, after a pause.

“ Shame on him, then,” said his sister, indignantly. “ I do not know where he would find a more thoroughly good and accomplished wife.”

William's heart throbbed as he listened to his sister's praise, and then, conscious that he was exposing his own feelings, began to admire the beauty of the night, pointing out the sharp outline of the hills which by daylight Frances knew familiarly, but which by the present light looked picturesque and odd enough. The road at length became so beautiful with the mingled elements of wood and water, seen by the silvery moonlight, that he reined in the mare to a walk, and allowed his sister to enjoy the simple, yet exquisite treat, at her ease.

Presently they heard some one riding rapidly behind them, and in a very short time Captain Vinen joined them.

“ I have left my father and mother behind,” said he, as William drew up to welcome him ; “ they got so enamoured of the moonlight that I rode forward with the hope of overtaking some of the party who preferred a quicker march.”

“ You will have to ride further then, Alfred,

I am afraid," said William, laughing. " You see the pace we are going at."

" And fare worse for my pains, William," rejoined Captain Vinen. " Thank you, I would rather not."

As he spoke he pulled in his horse to Frances' side of the phaeton.

" There is a very unusual light just over the village to-night," he said, a moment after. " Did you not notice it on the higher ground?"

William answered in the negative, and began to examine the sky with some anxiety, but the lane in which they were was so completely over-arched by trees that the faint twinkling of a star at intervals through the leaves was all he could discern.

" I hope there is not a fire," said Frances, " they are such great misfortunes."

" It can be nothing else," rejoined her brother, in a singularly low tone; " none of the foundry fires can be burning at this time of night. Let us drive a little faster."

He gave the old mare a sharp touch of

the whip, that put her into a trot on the instant.

Neither of the three spoke until they got out upon the open country again, but one at least of the party was watching every object they passed, to catch the first red gleam of the lurid firelight. He saw it reflected in the waters below long before the trees permitted him to see the heavens, and then merely said, in corroboration of Captain Vinen's views—

“It is a fire, and a very bad one.”

“Can you guess where it is?” asked his sister, struck by the peculiar tone of his voice.

“Not until we get further out of this confounded lane,” said William, applying the whip with greater vigour than his mare had ever smarted under before. “When we get to the brow of the hill I may be able to tell you.”

They relapsed into silence for the next three-quarters of a mile, Frances employing the time in pitying the people who were called upon to endure such a misfortune

as this fire threatened, her brother in steeling his mind to bear everything, if, as he dreaded, that misfortune had fallen upon himself.

“I think it cannot be very far off,” said the Captain at last; “if it is it must be a terrible conflagration indeed.”

Neither of his companions answered, for the place William had named as that from which they could obtain a good view of the valley beneath, was just on the point of being gained. Had Frances been aware of what was passing in her brother’s mind, she would not have mistaken the half-smothered prayer that burst from his lips at that moment, as the mare, startled by the sudden light, reared upon her haunches, threatening instant destruction to the occupants of the phaeton.

William’s voice calmed her in a moment, and then Frances, looking up, saw the sky above red with flame, and all within the wide circle of hills around them lit up with a lurid light that made her close her eyes with sudden fear.

“Good Heaven ! It must be the foundry,” she heard one of her companions exclaim, in a tone of terror, and looking up she distinctly saw her brother’s blanched cheek, as he strove to determine whether it was so or not.

He was out of the phaeton the next moment, exclaiming—

“For the love of God, Alfred, lend me your horse. Drive my sister home, there’s a good fellow, and then follow me ; quick ! quick !” and as Captain Vinen dismounted, he sprang into the empty saddle, applied the whip impetuously, and was out of sight in an instant.

“I hope my brother’s suspicions are incorrect,” said Frances, as Captain Vinen seated himself beside her, “It cannot be the foundry. How could it get on fire ?”

“Very easily,” rejoined her companion, urging the mare into a gallop. “I am afraid, Miss Frances, it is the foundry.”

“What will become of my poor brother ?” sobbed Frances, in great terror ; “it was only this morning he was rejoicing at the

prospect of being fully employed all through the winter ; and now this misfortune has come upon him.”

“ Do not alarm yourself for him. Gladstone has that within him which would triumph over twenty fires. Now, look, for you know every landmark here about much better than a stranger like myself. Is that huge mass of lurid flame down below there your brother’s foundry or not ?”

Frances looked. Captain Vinen had stopped the mare on the brow of a hill, from which the village of Braidsworth was easily discerned in this sudden and terrible illumination. He beheld the church windows flashing ruby red, distinguished the Rectory—its gardens—and a little beyond a street of cottages, at the end of which loomed a lofty chimney, around which the red, forked flames leaped and played as if already rejoicing over its prey.

It was the chimney of Mr. Gladstone’s foundry, and jammed in on every side, swarming about the engines, helping or re-

tarding the efforts of the firemen, was a sea of upturned heads that heaved to and fro as the crowd swayed backwards and forwards.

A moment after she saw a horseman ride up and dismount. She watched him give his horse in charge to someone at the edge of the crowd, and push his way through until he was lost to her view.

“Would you take charge of me if I could make my way down there, Captain Vinen?” she asked, as a sudden thought entered her mind. “I must be there as well as my brother.”

“Command me in any way you please,” he said, eagerly, as the vehicle rolled on. “I think I can get you very near the fire without encountering the crowd. I am glad to see you take it so calmly.”

Frances shook her head as she said—

“None of us will realise this new misfortune until the time for exertion is past. I

hope and trust William is insured; that will alleviate the evil a little."

"I think he is; I am sure he is too prudent to run such a heavy risk as he would incur if he was not," said her companion, as they drove up to "The Rookery." "Can Hannah take the mare out of the phaeton. I dare say your man will be, like everyone else, at the foundry."

"Let us do it ourselves," said Frances, springing out. "Perhaps the poor old woman is asleep by this time."

"It's a pitiful heart with which I have to welcome you home, Miss Frances," cried a rough, hoarse voice, as the door opened, and poor old Hannah ran out into the yard. "It's sad work that when Mr. William—God bless him!—goes out for a day to tak' holiday from the foundry this calamity comes."

"Perhaps, Hannah, things may not turn out so bad as we think they are," said Frances, who was far too busy with buckles and girths

to give much heed to the old servant's distress. "I am going down to the village with Captain Vinen, to see if I can be of any use to my poor brother. You had better keep up a good fire, and have something to eat and drink ready by the time we come back again; bring the lantern out of the kitchen to enable Captain Vinen to put the mare into the stable."

Astonished at her young mistress's coolness, old Hannah went back to her kitchen and brought the lantern as she had been desired.

A thought struck Frances as she was standing waiting in the yard, whilst Captain Vinen was littering some hay down for the mare. She ran upstairs and found a thick woollen shawl and a pair of clogs, and armed with these, she came down again and was waiting for him before he was ready.

"If you cannot get me into the foundry yard get me as near it as you can," she said, as they walked off at a quick pace. "Do not

be afraid of my fainting, or doing anything else equally ridiculous and unnecessary. I can bear everything now that I have braced my nerves up for any contingency."

"I will not take you where there is any danger," he said, with the quiet decision that Frances had already detected in him more than once. "The foundry yard will be full of firemen and engines, and ankle deep with water. I will not take you there."

"There is Braidsworth Lane."

"I can see at least a thousand human heads in it from here; listen, and you will hear their horrid oaths and yells."

"But I wish to be near my brother," urged Frances, whose courage rose the higher with every fresh effort he made to damp it. "I am not afraid of the crowd in the least."

"You will not do him any good," he said, stopping short altogether. "If you choose I will take you into the Mill Croft, which is very near the foundry, but quite far enough removed from the crowd to prevent your being

annoyed ; the wall is very low, and you can easily climb it.”

“ Take me wherever you think best,” said his companion, hurriedly. “ If you will venture with me into Braidsworth Lane, I will go there.”

“ I will not trust you there,” said he, using the tone of authority he had already employed more than once. “ Make your selection ! Consent to go to the Mill Croft, or stay with old Hannah.”

She clung closer to his arm, as he spoke, and Captain Vinen interpreting this into submission to what he judged best, walked on as rapidly as he could towards the fire. Frances, at times, had almost to run to keep up with him, but this she did not care for, as long as the distance between the foundry and herself was every moment becoming less. The light from the fire had by this time made the road they traversed as bright as noonday, so that they had little difficulty in finding the field in question.

The wall, as Captain Vinen had said, was not very high, and a place was soon found, which being in a rather dilapidated state, enabled her to scale it with comparative ease. Immediately beneath was Braidsworth Lane, crammed full with thousands of human beings, whilst right in front stood Mr. Gladstone's foundry, now, alas ! apparently doomed to inevitable destruction.

For one moment Frances's breath came and went, and she felt a fearful sensation of faintness and terror ; she almost immediately, however, conquered this feeling, and stood silent, awed, yet perfectly calm beside her companion, scarcely daring to stir or draw breath, and watching with intense interest the progress of events.

The crowd struck her as being singularly silent, now that the first outburst of excitement had spent itself, and looking down upon the bewildering mass of upturned heads, lit up by that lurid light, she was at once aware of the cause ; there was none of the usual

excitement one sees at such scenes visible in those sad and mournful countenances. As rafter after rafter fell, sending a dense mass of sparks into the night air, a low suppressed murmur burst from their heaving ranks, which her ear was but too ready to interpret into an expression of grief and despair.

Her own family was not the only one in Braidsworth that had cause to mourn the calamitous event of the night, for many a poor fellow saw his last hope of better days disappear, as the roof of William Gladstone's workshops fell in with a fearful crash.

Captain Vinen soon began to grow fidgety and impatient, as he stood eyeing the clumsy manner in which the firemen set about carrying the hose up one quarter of the building which as the fire had not yet touched it, and the wind was veering round, there might still be some chance of saving.

“The dolts! the fools!” Frances heard him mutter beneath his breath.

“They will let the flames get hold before they can get the hose carried up.”

He took a step or two forward, and came back to her side again, and she heard him mutter an oath as one great clumsy fellow let the hose slip through his hands when half way up the ladder.

“Miss Frances,” he said, abruptly, “I must not waste my time here, when I can be helping those useless fools yonder. You are perfectly safe, and I am sure you will excuse me when your brother’s interests are at stake.”

“For God’s sake go at once, Captain Vinen,” said Frances, eagerly. He had leaped the wall and disappeared before the last word died upon her lips.

There was something almost awful in the sensation she now experienced, in finding herself quite alone, looking down upon the terrible element of destruction before her; all around the crowd hurled hither and thither as their

terror drove them, the roaring of the fire and the dull splash of the water as it fell against the walls, or hissed over the burning rafters, the shrill cries of the firemen, mingled with shrieks for help among the crowd, and above all the fear she felt for her brother's safety were enough to appal a much stouter heart than Frances Gladstone possessed.

Her eyes ached with straining to discover either her brother's figure or that of Captain Vinen amongst the crowd ; she hid her face, resolved not to look again, when a new sound struck on her ear. It grew upon her until it burst into a perfect cheer, and looking up, Frances saw a solitary figure perched at a dizzy height upon the ladder, directing one of the hose at that part of the works which were still free from fire.

It was evidently a post of great danger, for the flames were leaping around this man in all directions, and at times, when the wind swept a cloud of smoke and sparks between

him and the crowd, Frances' heart died within her, as she remembered the risk he ran, but when the wind again swept the smoke away the intrepid seaman was once more visible on his dizzy height; and her spirit rose with the deafening cheer that burst from the spectators.

Presently Frances was aware that someone was standing near her, but at first she took no notice, so completely was her every feeling absorbed in watching the spectacle before her. The intruder, however, kept creeping nearer, and recollecting that Captain Vinen had left her, she looked round in some trepidation.

It was only a female, and coming forward Frances discovered it to be Sarah Crisp; she had no bonnet on, a thin shawl was thrown over her head and secured beneath her chin, and her dress betrayed marks of carelessness, as if she had caught up the first thing that came in her way and ran out with it in her hand.

“ Mr. Gladstone called on father in coming past, Miss Frances,” were Sarah’s first words, “ and as mother was sitting up with Jessie, I ventured out to see if I could do anything, but indeed the sight is so horrible that I came up here to be out of harm’s way. Father is in the middle of it all, I know ; and I wish no harm may come to him.”

“ Did you venture down, Sarah ?” asked Frances.

“ Just for a bit at first, but I soon crept away again, miss,” rejoined Sarah, “ the crowd down in Braidsworth Lane is ten times worse than the fire.”

“ And that is bad enough,” said Frances, in a low voice.

“ It is, indeed ; there will be many a sad hearth by to-morrow night at this hour,” said the girl, sadly. “ It will kill father, I know it will,” and she burst into tears.

Frances thought it by no means the least strange circumstance of this eventful night,

that she should undertake the part of comforter when she stood so much in need of being comforted herself. Sarah's grief, however, was so touching that it was impossible to avoid pitying her, even though the comforter's heart also seemed breaking.

"Don't fret in that way, Sarah," she said, taking the poor girl's clay-cold hand, "something will be done to help those that will suffer the most by this calamitous misfortune."

Sarah shook her head as she said—

"Father's so broken-hearted already, Miss Frances, that he'll never struggle through this night's work, I fear. You can't imagine what a change has come over him within the last week."

"Has he taken little Jessie's illness so much to heart?" asked Frances, as the girl looked into her pale, anxious face.

"It's not that alone, miss, although to be sure Jessie's sickness frets him more than

enough," sighed Sarah, whose large dark eyes seemed to reduce her thin white face to a shadow; "but there's mother sinking fast, and what with that and Fanny's leaving us, I dare say he'd as soon be under the ground as upon it, if it was God's will!"

Frances was inexpressibly shocked, and her manner showed it as she said—

"It is very wicked, Sarah, to murmur at the burden God puts upon us."

"But it's not God's will, Miss Frances, that we should starve," said the girl, with the boldness of despair. "He sends meat enough for all, the preacher tells us at church every Sunday."

"And always will, I trust, Sarah. Did you not hear that my brother had received a large order only yesterday, which would have kept all the men he could employ at full work during the year?"

Pale as was her companion's cheek before, it grew paler at these words. The news had

so different an effect to what Frances had anticipated, that she had some doubts whether Sarah exactly understood what she had said, and was therefore about to repeat the words, when the poor girl seized her hand as she demanded—

“And did everyone know of this, Miss Frances? Did Mr. Gladstone’s own men hear it?”

“They certainly knew it to-day, at any rate,” was the answer.

Sarah dropped the hand she had been holding with so firm a grasp, and for a moment stood as if lost in thought, whilst Frances watched by the lurid light the changes that passed over that sickly but not unpleasant countenance.

“I dare not stay out longer,” Sarah said, as she drew her thin shawl farther over her head, and turned as if to go; “mother will be wondering where I am, and I must have something ready against father comes in.

But, oh, Miss Frances ! I'm afraid there will be worse news yet of this night's work!"

With a heavy sigh, poor Sarah flitted into the darkness, and Frances was again alone.

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